

RED OIL *by* **THOMSON BURTIS** • **CARL D. LANE**
• **BILL ADAMS**

25¢



SEPT.

Adventure

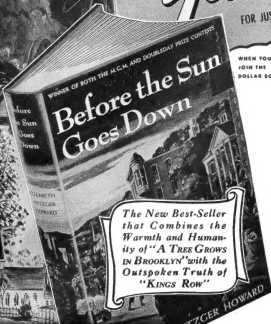


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O-O-O-H-H-H!

IT'S HIM OR THE FENCE!

MISTER, YOU'RE JUST PLAIN LUCKY!

YES, BUT THERE GOES THE RACE FOR ME

TOUGH BREAK FOR BOTH OF US, BOB

SIS, MEET HAL FOSS. HE LOST THE RACE, RISKING HIS LIFE TO SAVE MINE



AFTER THE RACE

CONGRATULATIONS, TOM. I COULDN'T LOSE TO A BETTER MAN

I'M THROUGH WITH MY RAZOR, HAL. YOU'RE NEXT



SAY, MY WHISKERS CAME OFF LIKE MAGIC. THAT BLADE'S PLENTY KEEN!

I ALWAYS USE THIN GILLETTES. THEY MAKE SHAVING A CINCH



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A TURBO-JET AUTO ENGINE? WOW! COUNT ME IN!

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Adventure

(Registered U. S. Patent Office)



Vol. 115, No. 5

for
September, 1946

Best of New Stories

THE NOVELETTE

- Red Oil..... THOMSON BURTIS 10**
 "It's good to be able to sling a gun faster than the next man," Bill Squibb told the Mick, "but as a profession and a way of life, it ain't exactly permanent." Sound enough advice under most circumstances, the Mick agreed, but he wanted in on the oil game the worst way—and with Donn Coda and his thugs riding herd on the whole Sewell field, it looked like the lightning-rods the Mick wore on his hips might have to be his tickets of admission to the world of big business, even as they had been to that world of slimmer pickings he'd known in the past.

SHORT STORIES

- One More Fight..... JOE ARCHIBALD 41**
 That was their theme song, the forlorn battle-cry of every slug-nutty, punch-drunk pug who ever stumbled along Cauliflower Row: *Just one more fight*. How else, they mumbled, could they pick up "easy money" like that? Frankie Riehl was no different from the rest, nor was the fresh kid who gave him such a terrific battering there in the Bentonville Armory. But would the kid ever believe it?
- A Horse for the Colonel..... HAL G. EVARTS 44**
 Rongo had helped foal the Red One, weaned him after the mare was killed in a fall, reared him from a wobbly-kneed colt, and now the sorrel belonged to the boy in a way no stranger could understand. What were five thousand rupees to him? All he could feel was contempt for this American officer to whom horseflesh meant nothing more than figures on a piece of paper. If the colonel wanted a mount there were plenty of ponies in Tibet but the Red One was not for such as he.
- The Poet and the Galley Slave..... CARL D. LANE 52**
 What a duel it was—verses versus vittles, genius pitted against genius—between Avery the poet and Sam Daball, chief steward of the riverboat *Valley Queen*. There were no holds barred and the chef's *chef d'oeuvre* was as epic in its way as the minstrel's masterpiece. The referee was hard put to it to choose between them but not Miss Amy—the *grande prise* you might call her. She knew which side her crêpes suzettes and ballades were buttered on.

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BE OUT ON SEPTEMBER 11TH ◆ ◆ ◆

Tunnel Man	WILBUE S. PEACOCK	60
There's balance under the river where high-pressure air and sludgy muck meet and the balance has to be maintained or the tunnelmen die in their mole-warren ninety feet below the surface. It's no place for yellowbellies, Shawn Keever learned, for one of that breed can tip the scale as surely as a clogged feeder pipe from the compressors.		
Whistler's Mudder	WILLIAM CAMPBELL GAULT	68
"He is a elegant horse, Jeff," said Whistler, gandering at the nag on which he'd just squandered my last fifteen hundred cabbage-leaves. "He ain't no dog, this Humidity . . . and he did look so lonesome." No wonder—considering the fact that, once a race got under way, that geegee never knew the company of his fellow bangtails.		
Charley Hoe Handle and the Loony Trout	JIM KJELGAARD	80
Charley had fought and caught rainbows in all kinds of water but when he saw that trout leap out of Kitty Lake he just sat in his canoe as pop-eyed as any Injun can get. They just didn't grow that big—particularly in a panfish lake which was what the Law claimed Kitty was. Of course the Law meant Warden "Horse" Jenkins so Charley could no more resist breaking it than he could help breathing.		
Breed of the Deep	BILL ADAMS	84
All tried, in their various ways, to invoke the gods of the deep and call down a wind to move that ill-fated ship out of the doldrums. The Finn whistled and the Irishman sang; the Cockney cursed and the Brazilian prayed; the Jamaican talked to his rabbit's foot while the Greek blew at the sails of a full-rigged model of the ship herself. But it took a stowaway to change their luck, send 'em tearing on to Frisco.		
The Hodag and Moose Milk O'Brien	HECTOR CHEVIGNY	92
It was bad enough for Slater to try to steal Moose Milk's gal but when the sailor started to pull his leg with tales about fantastic creatures like the giraffe (with a neck seventeen feet long!) and the kangaroo (with a pocket to carry its young 'uns in!) that was more than he could take.		
Chow-Hound	EDWARD ARTHUR DOLPH	122
Veterans of the old 59th on Corregidor will never forget Python, the mongrel mascot of Btry G—nor the terrible fate of Fussy Fink, the major who didn't like dogs. It was a fight to the finish but when Fussy's oak leaves withered in ignominious defeat, the chow gallantly paid his respects to his vanquished foe in his own inimitable way.		

THE SERIAL

Sword Land (3rd of 4 parts)	HENRY JOHN COLYTON	98
In which Fitz-Brian and Milo ride recklessly into the enemy's camp to avenge the Dun Cathach massacre; a lifelong friendship comes to a tragic end there in the Irish bogs; and a great battle is fought, in which the Norman loses a hand—and a year out of his life.		

THE FACT STORY

Wheels in the Sea	VINCENT H. GADDIS	77
Rolling millstones of fire, they are among the most baffling mysteries which face modern nautical science. Who can tell what sets these ocean-dwelling wheels spinning beneath the billows?		

DEPARTMENTS

The Camp-Fire	Where readers, writers and adventurers meet	6
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*Cover Painted for Adventure by Peter Stevens
Kenneth S. White, Editor*



THE CAMP-FIRE

Where Readers, Writers and Adventurers Meet

AFTER we'd finished reading "The Poet and the Galley Slave"—Carl D. Lane's mouth-watering culinary-cum-riverboating adventure on page 52—and our digestive juices had simmered down to an approximately normal state of ferment, permitting us to regard the yarn with a cold editorial eye rather than the hot orb of a gourmet, we were struck by what seemed an out-of-character naming of the famous bard. In a story so typically New England we were jarred by the poet, James, having what seemed to us a typically un-Yankee first name—Ruez. We asked Mr. Lane how come and he answers—

On second thought I'm inclined to agree about the business of the name Ruez James. However—though I'll grant that its flavor is not Yankee—the name Ruez appears in early American coastal history frequently. One of our earliest steamship masters out of New York was Ruez Whitely and I know a modern Ruez (Ruez L. Mead) in the New London area. I haven't the least idea why I used the name . . . perhaps for some notion that it was euphonious! My mental picture of Ruez James was more of Dan'l Webster than Lowell, Whittier et al. So what say we call our bard Russel or Lowell James or some such?

But I can't honestly tie up this story with the travels of real bards of the last century. The actual inspiration for the background came from notes made by Dickens on his American tour. These notes, incidentally, damn every American custom, steamboat,

hotel, railroad and person he met . . . except "Dandy Dick" Sherman and his Str. Burlington on Lake Champlain. Charlie Dickens must have imbibed too much as he thumped down the lake toward old Ti; he presented Sherman with a snuff box and signed the trip-log of the Burlington with the polite comment, "a most enjoyable voyage through the provinces." Dickens apparently didn't know that the Revolution was over.

You will be interested to know that the menu for the grand dinner was the exact one which was served by the New York Yacht Club on October 1st, 1851 to the returned and victorious crew of the Schooner-Yacht America . . . she of the Queen's Cup fame. Commodore John C. Stevens was the guest of honor at the banquet, which was held at the Astor House, New York City. There were, by count, 86 separate dishes in the 14 courses served. There were many juicy dishes which I could not include . . . like Cake of Game, with Atelottes; Fillet of Eels, Decorated; Lafayette Cakes and Vergaloo Pears. Here are the ornamental confectioneries which were served—Frigate Constitution, Steamer Baltic, Temple of Liberty, Club House of the NYYC at Hoboken, America and Titania (yacht race!). If you really want to drool get "The Yacht America" by Winfield Thompson (Charles E. Lauriat Co., Boston, 1925). The drooling starts on page 311!

So Ruez he remained—that first paragraph of Mr. Lane's letter put a definite stet to it, Yankee or no—and instead of de-

(Continued on page 8)

How to Outbluff a VICIOUS DOG at night!

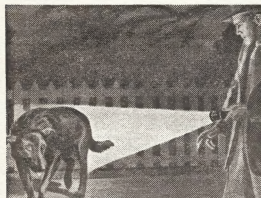


...as recommended by Lt. Commander Willy Necker, Wheeling, Ill.—noted dog trainer and judge at dog shows...and wartime head of U. S. Coast Guard War Dog Training.



1 The fact that 999 dogs out of a thousand are friendly, safe and lovable doesn't alter the fact that occasionally—through mistreatment, neglect or disease—a dog *may* turn vicious. Such animals are dangerous. Especially at *night!* If cornered—

2 Outdoors, at night, turn on your "Eveready" flashlight! Shine it directly at the dog's eyes, to blind and perhaps bewilder him. He may leap at the light, however; so don't hold it in front of you. Hold it at arm's length to the side.



3 Keep still. Don't move. It's instinctive with most animals to attack anything that runs away or moves aggressively. If the dog refrains from attacking for a few seconds, you have probably won—he is apt to growl at the light, then slink off.



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(Continued from page 6)

letting all those Ruezes (what a plural!) and pencilling in a passel of Russels or Lowells we simply went out for an early lunch (fillet of eels with vergaloo pears)!

ONLY two recruits to the ranks of our Writers' Brigade this issue—an old soldier and (what do you know!) an ex-editor. Edward A. Dolph, who gives us "Chow-Hound" on page 126, bridges a seventeen-year hiatus on his first appearance in these pages with the following—

I was born in Michigan, raised in the state of Washington and educated at West Point where I was graduated in 1918. I remained in the Army until 1931. I served in France and Germany and with the Polish Typhus Relief Expedition in Poland. After a year back in the States I sailed for the Philippines where I was stationed on Corregidor, the scene of "Chow-Hound." I travelled all over the islands and visited China, Japan, Borneo, Guam and Hawaii. I came back to West Point as instructor in English and Economics in 1924. While there I began to write fiction and Sunday magazine articles. I also published a book, "Sound Off! Soldier Songs from Yankee Doodle To Parley Voo" in 1929. This gave the words and music and the history of everything sung in the Army since the days of the Revolution. It was revised and republished in 1942. For several years after leaving the Army I was too busy with business and other affairs to do much writing. "Chow-Hound" is the second story that I have done since I have resumed fiction-writing.

The story is, of course, entirely fictional except for one or two details. There was a mongrel chow mascot in one of the batteries of my regiment on Corregidor. His name wasn't Python, but he was a typical soldier dog with not much use for officers. There was, of course, no Major Fink, although I have met the same kind of "gentleman" at various times and in various places. So has many a G.I. in this war. And yes, that chow did sprinkle an officer's boot one day under very amusing circumstances, but there was no feud between them; and the officer, who was exceptionally well liked by all of the enlisted men, laughed as heartily as anyone else at his predicament. Both the dog and that officer have long since left this earthly scene.

It is indeed a pleasure to sit in this way, on a Camp-Fire session, for I have long known and read *Adventure* and the first story I ever wrote, many years ago, was accepted by the magazine with the stipulation that I make certain changes. Unfortunately, I took too long to make those changes, the magazine changed hands, the editorial staff changed, and I've had to wait seventeen years before finally getting into such good company.

We told Mr. Dolph, in no uncertain terms, that that was seventeen years too many and he's promised not to let it happen again. There'll be another yarn from his typewriter any issue now.

WILBUR S. PEACOCK, whose "Tunnel Man" appears on page 60 this month, confesses that it's taken him eight years to land on our contents page. Stories in *SEP*, *Argosy*, *Collier's* et al have helped swell the interim. However, as he says, "Adventure, like death, is inevitable." Damned if it ain't and hell, after all, look at Dolph up there who dallied for seventeen—and Peacock's only thirty-one. Then, of course, there were those three years on the wrong side of the desk when the guy slaved at editing! (Fiction House) For a "hick from Kansas" as he characterizes himself he's gone far. We're expecting another yarn to roll off his platen for us shortly.

WE realized that American soldiers had covered a lot of strange territory and found themselves in innumerable far-flung corners of the world during the war but until we read Hal G. Evarts' "A Horse for the Colonel" on page 44 we'd never suspected that to their other fabulous activities should be added horse-trading in the Lolo hinterland east of Tibet.

We asked Mr. Evarts for a bit of background on this obscure facet of American military ubiquitousness and here's what he answered—

Any reader may well lift his eyebrows and ask what U.S. Army troops were doing in the Tibetan hinterlands at any time during the war. For a good many reasons this minor operation was overlooked in the rush of more dramatic and headline-worthy developments in the Pacific and in China.

At that time—if you'll bear with a bit of necessary backtracking—it looked as though China might be knocked out of the war any day. During the fall and winter months of 1944 the Japs in south China overran most of Kwangsi Province, reached the Kweichow border and threatened Chungking itself. At the same time the Japs in Burma still held a death grip on their end of the Burma-Ledo Road. The U.S. 14th Air Force bases at Kweilin and Luichow fell. China was blockaded except for a trickle of materiel being flown over the Hump from Assam. For Chiang Kai-Shek this series of setbacks marked the low ebb in seven years of war.

The Chinese needed transport desperately. Their few miles of railway, road network and fleets of trucks were inadequate, even for an army that moved on its feet.

(Continued on page 139)

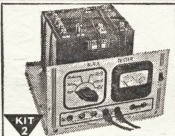


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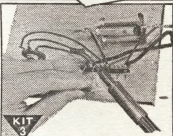
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6 Big Kits
of Radio Parts**



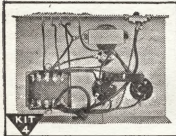
KIT 1
I send you Soldering Equipment and Radio Parts; show you how to do Radio soldering; how to mount and connect Radio parts; give you practical experience.



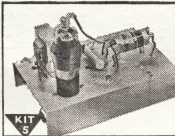
KIT 2
Early in my course I show you how to build this N.B.I. Tester with parts 1 send. It soon helps you fix neighborhood Radios and earn EXTRA money in spare time.



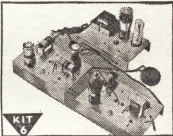
KIT 3
You get parts to build Radio Circuits; then test them; see how they work; learn how to design special circuits; how to locate and repair circuit defects.



KIT 4
You get parts to build this Vacuum Tube Power Pack; make changes which give you experience with packs of many kinds; learn to correct power pack troubles.



KIT 5
Building this A. M. Signal Generator gives you more valuable experience. It provides amplitude-modulated signals for many tests and experiments.



KIT 6
You build this Superheterodyne Receiver which brings in local and distant stations—and gives you more experience to help you win success in Radio.

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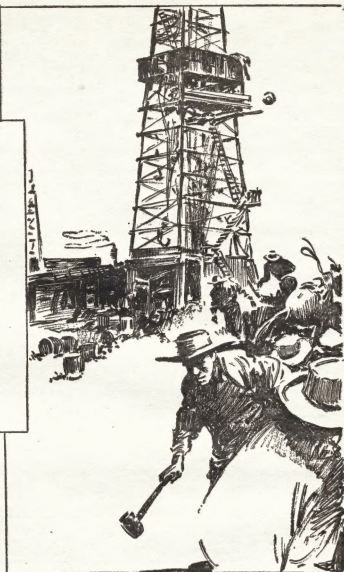


ILLUSTRATED
BY
FRANK KRAMER

RED OIL

By
THOMSON
BURTIS

To a man, the drilling crew raced off the derrick floor.



THE Mick, as usual, gave the effect of absolute immobility on the back of the rangy horse walking easily up the long slope. Behind them stretched an endless gray-green sea of prairie, and from just over the rise there came a continuous, deep-toned hum.

As horse and rider reached the top of the rise, the cow-pony stopped, without any need of a signal from its rider. Like a statue, man

and beast stood limned against the sky while the Mick's eyes moved slowly from west to east, as though soaking in every detail of the scene spread before them in the saucer between the hills. It was as though his eyes were the only live things in his body.

In the exact center of the valley, surrounded by low hills on all four sides, was the town. Its core was the two rows of low, sometimes false-fronted buildings characteristic of the



Oklahoma Territory. But fanning out in all directions from this core were the tents, unpainted board structures, and occasional two-story buildings which showed plainly that Sewell was on the boom.

Spread along the opposite hillside to the north, four dozen towering hundred and twelve-foot wooden derricks, many of them with crews at work on the derrick floors, were the sources of that continuous low hum. They were



the visible evidences of the wealth which had drawn the thousands of people who swarmed the streets of Sewell like a horde of ants around a pile of sugar. Scattered along the western hillside were other derricks, while to the east there was only one. Rimming the bases of the hills to east, west and north were huge black lakes of oil, interspersed with shallow depressions in the earth—sumps already dug to receive the oil which flowed from every one of the completed wells.

It was a full minute before anything but the Mick's eyes moved. Then his right hand reached slowly for the pocket of the blue jeans, and his hand fingered the two round silver dollars in it. Then he was motionless once more.

From somewhere in the vicinity of that single well to his right there came a rumble. And suddenly that single well became the very heart of the Sewell field.

A half dozen men, a little distance from the derrick floor, had been working easily, unscrewing each length of drill-stem as it came up out of the hole. But that faraway rumble turned the scene of quiet industry into one of absolute frenzy. And as though shocked into life by the same electric current, the Mick touched his horse with one spur. He didn't know much about the oil business, but he did know that the crew must have been taking a core, and that that rumble deep in the earth meant that the well was coming in prematurely.



THE long-legged, ewe-necked horse suddenly became a thing of beauty as it raced around the rim of hills toward the well. Sitting easily in the saddle, the Mick never took his eyes from that derrick floor. He dropped the reins over the horn and calmly and easily tied down the flapping holster at each thigh, like a master workman laying out his tools.

He saw the drilling crew start to run from the derrick floor, and stop as one of the two spectators faced them, then walk unwillingly back to work. The derrick man had come down from his lofty perch with urgency prompted by fear, and was now facing the man who had stopped the rush from the derrick floor.

The Mick, apparently unnoticed, reined his horse a few feet back of the towering man who was now pointing upward at the platform from which the derrick man had been helping stack the lengths of drill-stem. The rest of the crew was just about to resume work when the crust of the earth began literally to shake with the power of the released gas, almost two thousand feet below the surface. The rumble was growing to a roar, and now the big black-haired man was shouting to make himself heard.

"Five hundred dollars a man if you get the

rest of that drill-stem out of the hole and valve on before she blows in!" he was saying, without excitement. "And a thousand dollars to any man who'll go up in the derrick—"

"A thousand ain't any good to a corpse," the derrick man said flatly.

The roar of the gas died to a whisper, and the big man whose face the Mick had not yet seen spoke quietly.

"I was under the impression," he said icily, "that I had hired some oilmen."

"You get all the profits," said a gray-haired man who had the look of a cowman about him. "A wild well'll cost you plenty. Why don't you go up yourself?"

"Not a bad idea," said the big man. "Get to work."

As he started for the ladder, the earth came alive again. Slowly, with an effect of onrushing, irresistible disaster, the low hum from the center of the earth grew steadily nearer and louder. And now the floor crew was working frantically. And up on the derrick platform, squarely over the mouth of the well, the boss was working, contemptuous of the unbridled forces rushing up to, perhaps, destroy him.

The next to last length of drill-stem was detached with the big chain wrench, and the big man helped guide it to the stack of pipe in one corner of the derrick. The Mick studied him carefully.

It was hard to believe, but up there in that derrick must be Donn Coda himself. And if it was Donn Coda, he was a sucker. A man worth two million dollars, and the majority owner of a new oilfield, was nothing but a sucker to risk his life that way. He had guts, the Mick thought quietly, but he was acting like either a fool or a showoff, and Donn Coda wasn't supposed to be either.

He didn't look anything like what the Mick had pictured him. In fact, there was only one thing he could see that was right about the setup. That was that the men who were working there for an extra five hundred dollars apiece didn't like their boss. The Mick himself would have felt uneasy to be the focal point of the kind of looks that drilling crew were throwing at the king of Sewell.

Coda was tall and thin, and from the angle at which the Mick stood, looked like a giant in stature. The long, thin face which gave the effect of bone covered by skin with no intervening flesh, was almost that of an ascetic, and was merely a frame for the longest, narrowest brown eyes the Mick had ever seen. Thick black hair, greased until it was like patent leather, was parted exactly in the middle. Even in riding breeches, scuffed boots and flannel shirt, Donn Coda looked exactly like what he had been most of his life: the product, and later one of the rulers, of a considerable

section of the Tenderloin of New York. Coda, the Mick had heard, meant wolf in Italian, and Donn Coda could not have adopted, to say nothing of being born with, a more suitable label.

And yet, there was that big city racketeer, standing up there in the derrick when any second there might spout from the ground a force which would pick him up and throw him around like a dried leaf in the wind.

And just then it happened.

The last length of drill-stem, hollow core-barrel attached, had just come free from the hole. As though the removal of the pipe had released the forces below, the roar of the rising column of gas became a frantic bellow, and riding its crest came a dozen small stones.



DONN CODA was leaning over a little, preparing to help stack the length of drill-stem. Just too late, he flung an arm over his face, and tried to fling himself out of the

path of the rocks. The immobile Mick saw a rock as big as his fist glance off Coda's temple. His long lean body slumped unconscious over the wooden guard rail.

To a man, the drilling crew raced off the derrick floor, leaving the drill-stem swinging from side to side, upheld by the block and tackle which gripped it. For an instant, they looked upward at the boss, slumped there squarely in the path of whatever might come out of the mouth of the well. Now the roar of the gas was increasing to an almost unbearable volume, and the first drops of black oil were staining the very crown block of the derrick.

One of the drillers yelled something at the Mick as he raced past him. His horse was restless, but the Mick paid no heed: The boilerman stopped briefly to make sure that the door of the boiler was tight shut.

Deliberately, the Mick swung off his horse, and gave it a slap. He didn't like to see any man battered to death. And this man was Donn Coda. The Mick wanted to live as much as anyone, but there were times when an hombre after big stakes must take big chances.

His slightly bowed legs, unusually long for the short torso, did not succeed in giving him an effect of height, and his square, slightly freckled face was no more impressive than the small Stetson, stained with sweat, which surmounted it. His blue eyes, clouded into near-blackness now, never left Coda as he ran toward the ladder. There was little of the usual awkwardness of the rider on high heels, and in some curious fashion he seemed relaxed even while he was swarming swiftly up the ladder.

Just as he reached the platform, the roar of the gas reached another crescendo. A cloud of

drops, almost invisible in the rush of gas, thoroughly soaked Coda and the derrick. Any second now, a mighty flood of oil would ride that gush of gas, and almost inevitably Coda would be flung thirty feet to the derrick floor.

Then the gas, as though relaxing to gather its forces for the climactic rush of a "header" well, retreated for a moment back into the hole. The Mick, now soaked with oil, got a grip on Coda. He stooped and put his shoulder under the unconscious man's waist. He was looking down, and when the bullethole appeared in his left sleeve, inches from Coda's head, it seemed for the moment as surprising and harmless as a magician's trick. The roar of the gas had drowned out the crack of the rifle, and muffled the whining hum of the bullet.

In the space of less than a second, the Mick had figured it out. The bullet had come, probably, from that thick patch of undergrowth on the northern hillside. Someone wasn't very enthusiastic about the idea of Donn Coda's life being saved.

Now from below, the note of the gas coming up fast out of the hole was rising. The Mick had Coda at the ladder, and he was just wondering how he could get his burden down that slippery set of rungs when the body over his shoulder stirred. Coda's hands touched him, and a hoarse voice shouted, without emotion, "I'm O.K. Hurry!"

The two men were down the ladder and racing side by side away from the well while a great cloud of oil was flung clean over the crown block. The swaying length of drill-stem became a battering ram, and the crew gazed unemotionally at the stranger and their boss.

For a space of one hundred feet around the derrick, the ground was already black with the rain of oil. The two men slowed to a walk, neither one showing an inclination for speech. Coda looked at his crew, and the Mick started wiping off his slippery hand on a dry patch in his jeans on the inside of the thigh. Then he took both guns from their holsters, wiped off the butts, and returned them to their holsters.



ALL conversation had to be shouted. Coda's voice showed no exultation or emotion of any kind, but the Mick noticed that those brown eyes had a red glow in them, and he wondered whether the leanness of Coda's body and that fleshless face were not the result of a terrific inner fire that Coda did not dare let the world see, or even suspect.

"She's a header all right, like the others," Coda said to the driller. "Get the valve on, the second she stops. Of course—I've got an idea there won't be long between headers."

Then, as though the controlled emotion with-

in him demanded a physical outlet, his arm swung around that eastern hillside, as though encompassing uncounted thousands of acres beyond.

"She proves up a thousand acres, or I'm a liar—and I've got a lease on every acre—"

"And every acre stole, like this one!"

The words had spurted from the lips of the gray-haired roughneck, as uncontrollable as the gas which was roaring from the well. He strode forward with that same effect of being driven by forces beyond his control. The Mick took one look at the gray eyes of the old-timer, and when he saw the blank stare in them, he flexed his fingers a little.

Coda's thin mouth widened just a little. His eyes were amused.

"If you and your friends had had a little more guts and money," he said, "you'd have got somewhere—"

"And now we're nowhere, and I know it. And we can't lick you, and I know that, so—"

The old-timer's hand moved fast. But the Mick moved so fast that he didn't seem to have moved at all.

"Not now," he said, both guns trained at the hand which half-thrust into the roughneck's shirt. He jerked his head at Coda. "No gun, and still a little woozy, maybe."

There was just the hint of a brogue in the Mick's words. His eyes were a lighter blue now, but curtains seemed to have been drawn over them.

"What's your name, sir?"

The eyes of the older man and those of the crew seemed unable to leave the two guns.

"Why?"

"I'm a stranger, and I kind of thought I'd like to know you."

Suddenly Coda took a step forward. It was as though he had just comprehended the fact that the roughneck had intended to kill him. The fleshless face was without expression, but the narrow eyes were hard and opaque as slate.

"You've been asking for it a long time, Slade, and now you're going to get it—with these two hands," Coda said quietly.

And then the Mick got some understanding of why Slade had failed in whatever it was he had tried in the oil business. Whether he was too old, too tired, or too weak, the fact was that he broke under Coda's icy words. He stood for a second, staring at Coda, and then turned and started running toward four horses tethered in a small clump of bushes, fifty yards away.

And the Mick could now understand a part of Coda's reputation too. The uncrowned king of Sewell watched the old man for an instant and then, with complete unexpectedness, started after him. It was as strange, and as big a sucker play for a man like Coda to run

after a now harmless old man as it was for him to go up in the derrick of one of his own wells.

Slade flung himself on his horse, and as Coda came up to him, he kicked out with one leg. The boot caught Coda on the cheek, gashing it. Slade was off at a gallop, angling northward down the hill.

CHAPTER II

ONE GOOD TURN—



THE Mick walked deliberately toward his own mount which was grazing peacefully just beyond where the others were standing.

He saw Coda mount and take after the fleeing Slade. The Mick got aboard his horse, and in a second had the long-legged cow-pony at full gallop. He had no intention of staying anywhere but close to Donn Coda for a while.

Slade turned his horse a little, to ride up the long side of a sump at the foot of the northern hills. It was coming dark, and both Slade and Coda, less than ten feet ahead of him, were black shadows against the darkening hillside.

The Mick, gaining on them, saw Slade's horse lose his footing as a section of earth on the edge of the sump crumbled and fell into the oil. As the horse stumbled, Slade was pitched into the lake of oil. His horse had stopped so abruptly that Coda's mount, seeing it, spread his legs into a sudden skid. Coda, a poor rider, sprawled through the air and into the oil.

Slade was on his feet, rubbing his oil-stuck eyes with one hand, and wiping the viscous petroleum from under his nose with the other. The Mick was sitting his horse quietly on the very edge of the sump, when Coda came upright, teeth gleaming white in a black mask of a face.

He started wading toward Slade, a few feet away.

The Mick, still giving the impression of complete economy of movement and energy, took the coiled rope from the side of his saddle, placed it in his left hand, and with the right picked up the noose and fifteen feet of rope. He swung the noose once, lazily. It settled around Coda's neck, just as the oilman was bending Slade forward as though to drown him in the oil.

The Mick jerked on the rope just once—hard. The roar of the well was dying now, as the head came to a close, and the Mick's conversational tone was easily audible.

"Beat it, Slade," he said.

Coda, clawing at the rope around his neck, wasted no words. He struggled toward the Mick, while Slade scrambled weakly up the

bank of the sump and got on his horse. Neither Coda nor the Mick looked at the older man as he loped toward town.

Coda was carrying the noose in his hand as he walked toward the Mick, and the rider dismounted as though to meet the oilman on an even footing. Coda seemed unaware of the layer of smelly petroleum which covered every inch of him, save mouth and the eyes themselves. They were so black, and so little white showed, that the Mick felt as though he had to keep watching them or he might find it difficult to find them again.

"Still quite a boy, aren't you?" Coda said hoarsely.

He handed the Mick his rope.

"Whaddaya mean—still?"

"You're the Mick, aren't you?"

The square-faced rider's jaw went a little further to one side as it thrust forward a little, and there was an effect of alertness behind his physical relaxation.



The Mick swung the noose once, lazily, and it settled around Coda's neck.

"Uh-huh. I don't seem to remember you, though."

"You wouldn't."

"I'd remember you if I'd seen you."

"You didn't see me. But I was watching you through glasses after I'd changed croupiers on you three times."

Slowly the Mick pushed his battered little Stetson back on his head. A forelock of sandy hair fell over his forehead. His eyes were dark-blue again.

"Where was this?" he asked.

"I used to have a piece of the Gay Place in Juarez. Nobody knew it. You took ten thousand of my money that night."



FOR the first time since he had arrived in Sewell, the Mick smiled. It was a crooked, one-sided smile which, combined with the fore lock and the slight sideward jut of his jaw, suddenly made him someone who once seen, could never be forgotten.

"I went over to El Paso, and the poker game lasted three weeks, each of us taking turns sleeping for four hours."

"How'd you come out?" Coda asked politely.

"I was twenty-eight thousand ahead and dealt a cold hand with a kind of drunk hombre for his ranch and cattle. He won."

"Pretty big stuff," Coda said. "Well, you've done me two favors, so I owe you something."

"Not necessarily," lied the Mick.

"And you put a rope around my neck, which maybe cancels the debt."

"Hell, you hadn't ought to try to drown that pore old man in oil," the Mick said, his eyes still very dark and watchful.

"He tried to kill me, didn't he?"

"Uh-huh—" He paused. "You know, Coda, you're a pretty big shot, but sometimes you don't act it."

"As long as I'm a big shot, I'll act the way I please!"

Coda snapped out the words. He had been stung, and showed it. The Mick, poker-faced, was sure now what kind of a hand Donn Coda was holding inside himself. And yet there was something in the man which shone through the ridiculous-looking coat of oil.

"All right," Coda went on coolly. "You saved my life twice, say—so what do you want?"

"I don't know what price to put on my tender heart," the Mick smiled.

"Nobody ever did anything for Donn Coda that he didn't expect a return for. I know enough about you to know that if it'd been an ordinary guy up in the derrick, you'd have let him rot there. So what do you want?"

"I want in the oil business," the Mick said quietly.

"A job?"

"A job where I can get somewheres."

A very thin white line split the black mask on Coda's face. His eyes were suddenly looking beyond the Mick.

"They used to say along the border," he said, "that you were as good a man with a gun as ever lived. Wild Bill Hickok not excepted. You're still good. That means you're in practice."

"Sure I'm in practice. What's on your mind?"

"There's a fellow riding toward us," Coda said, "who was my bodyguard for a while. How about you being just that?"

"I've been one, and I didn't like it."

"Who did you work for?"

"Porfirio Diaz," the Mick said.

Coda tried to snap his fingers, and couldn't.

"So you're the gunman they had to smuggle out of Mexico—"

"Past history. I said I wanted a job where I could get somewheres."

Again that thin white streak appeared across Coda's face. It was almost dark now.

"What good are you without your guns?" Coda asked.

"I don't know, but I aim to find out," the Mick said. "My guns and my gambling have left me with two bucks. Understand?"

"So the Mick's settling down," Coda said.

"Let's talk turkey." The Mick pulled that battered little Stetson down over his eyes. "I want a bed tonight, and a meal. How about fixing it—for a guy with two dollars?"

"The Palace Hotel," Coda said. "Room'll be ready for you with meals. See me at my office tomorrow around nine o'clock. Coda Development Corporation—right opposite the hotel . . . Hello, Joe."



THE Mick had known that someone was coming up behind him, but he had not once turned his head. The only unnecessary motion he had made since coming to Sewell had been pushing his hat back and forth. He had put his back against his horse the second that Coda had said that someone was coming toward them.

"Hi, boss," came a deep voice, and suddenly the Mick flexed the fingers of both hands.

Red Joe Race rode into the Mick's vision, and before Coda could introduce them, the Mick said, "Long ways from Mexico City, Joe."

The half-breed, riding bareback, looked down at the Mick and took a deep breath.

"The Mick," he said. "Closest I've ever been to you."

"That's right."

"I see you two guys know each other," Coda said. "I'm going back to the well, and then to the hotel. See you tomorrow morning, Mick."

"Adios. And say, Coda—"

The Mick pointed to the bullet hole in his sleeve. Each eye now seemed to be looking sideways, like those of an animal, as he watched both Red Joe and Coda at the same time.

"A real good man with a rifle shot at you when I was dragging you off that derrick," he said.

For a moment Coda, the spawn of the city slums, said nothing. Then he got himself together. The act which had become so much a part of himself that he almost believed in it, was never better as he spoke.

"This is the wildest town in the wildest section of the United States. The only law is Federal law, and there isn't much of that. Men who are wanted in the States can't be extradited from here, except for Federal offenses—and I'm the biggest man in town. That's why I need a bodyguard."

The Mick's crooked smile appeared briefly.

"Red Joe," he said, "is supposed to be as good as they come with a gun—"

"And as bad as they come with a bottle," Coda said. "See you *mañana*."

He walked to his horse and swung aboard. As he turned toward the well, it headed again, but now the valve had been attached, and the oil flowed through a pipe toward a sump at the foot of the hill.

For a moment, the Mick almost forgot the small half-breed and Donn Coda. A great torch flamed into being alongside a well on the southern slopes, and one by one every well came alive in the lights of its torch—natural gas piped from the well itself, trailing great red banners across the blackening sky. The derricks were like an army of giants carrying banners, and the Mick drew in a long breath, very slowly, and exhaled for a long time.

Red Joe's eyes were as bright and watchful as those of a chipmunk, which animal he closely resembled. He was small and so admirably put together that he looked even smaller than he was. He was wearing a huge

sombrero, now tilted back on his head far enough to show that no two of his raggedly-cut hairs went in even approximately the same direction. His skin was red, but the color of it seemed to be more the result of high blood pressure than the copper of his Indian ancestors. His speech was the slowly slurred lingo of the Southwesterner.

"The Mick," he said. "I hope we ain't never on opposite sides again."

"Me, too. Funny we never met up in that lame-brained revolution you hombres thought up—"

"I didn't think it up. I worked there."

"They told me you'd said you were aiming to shoot it out with me over Dolores."



RED JOE pushed that oversized hat farther back on his head with his left hand. His right was hanging loosely alongside his thigh, holding his Winchester. His finger was inside the trigger-guard. He grinned.

"People like you and me," he said, "oughtn't never to go lookin' for each other, over nothin'."

"That's right," the Mick said, hands hanging loosely at his thighs. "I'm aming to go over to that underbrush there. How about coming along?"

"Why?"

"Company."

"What's the idea of goin' over there?"

The Mick's cloudy blue-black eyes stared into the Indian's. He used his head, not a hand, to gesture at the hole in his sleeve.

"Thought I might find a rifle shell there," he said.

Red Joe's alert little eyes darted back and forth, but each time they looked briefly into the Mick's. The Mick nodded his head at the Indian's rifle and said quietly, "Maybe from a Winchester."

Red Joe laughed, suddenly and silently.

"You will," he said.

The Mick, standing motionless and relaxed, smiled his crooked smile.



"That's cooperation," he said.

"I said before that you and me oughtn't never to be on opposite sides. I got nothin' to hide—from you."

"Thanks," said the Mick. "I was just wonderin', being as you knew there was a Winchester shell somewheres around that brush, whether you might know who the hombre that shot the gun was shootin' at."

Red Joe laughed his silent laugh again.

"He's a friend of mine," he said. "And he told me he was shootin' at Coda, on account he thinks Coda is a thievin' son of a ———"

The Mick flexed his fingers a little, and smiled again.

"This friend of yours," he said, "is sure he wasn't maybe shooting at me?"

"Positive."

The Mick studied the watchful little half-breed for a long ten seconds. Then his eyes became lighter, and without the movement of a muscle there was the feeling about him of terrific tension, suddenly relieved.

"All right, Joe," he said. "Now tell me about Coda."

The Indian shook his head.

"You're the feller that's runnin' around takin' care of him," he said.

"I see. And you didn't much care who you hit up on the derrick, did you?"

"I got nothin' against you yourself."

"Except that I'm a Coda man?"

"I ain't sayin'."

"O.K., Joe."

For a few seconds neither man moved. Then Red Joe raised one hand in a little gesture of farewell, and said, "You wouldn't shoot nobody in the back. I know that."

He clucked to his horse, and did not look back as he rode away. The Mick mounted and started toward town.

CHAPTER III

THE KING OF SEWELL



HIS progress down the main street of Sewell was much slower than a man could walk. From wooden sidewalk to wooden sidewalk, the street was a solid mass of wagons

and horses. The vehicles ranged from buggies to lumber wagons, carrying drilling equipment and the riders from blanketed Indians to Easterners in smart riding breeches and boots. Lease hounds, well scouts, capitalists and roughnecks mingled with cowpunchers, Indians and the scum of the country—the men and women who were wanted by law where there was some law.

The Mick's eyes were a bright blue now, and they roved from side to side, absorbing the details of what he saw. The curtains

which usually hid what lay behind those eyes had parted. What they revealed was an almost boyish zest in everything from the clashing music of a dozen player pianos and phonographs to the last drunken Indian asleep beside a building.

At least a quarter of the structures on the main street housed roaring combinations of dancehall, saloon and gambling house. There were tents advertising cots at five dollars a night, and queues of men outside every eating place. The air was electric with the vibrations of big things happening, or about to happen, and lending the last touch of fantasy were the flaring red gas torches which supplied the main illumination.

The Palace Hotel, a full three stories high, loomed ahead of him, and opposite was an unpainted two-story building from which protruded a large sign, hung over the wooden sidewalk. It read:

General Offices

THE CODA DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Donn Coda:

President & General Mgr.

"Sure gives himself billing," the Mick thought.

Not that any of the places were shrinking violets as far as signs were concerned. All the standard frontier names: "The Last Chance" and "The Silver Dollar," and "The Frontier Post" were there, interspersed with others—"Mamie's Place" and "The Palace of Pleasure."

But a sign, a few doors from Coda's office, stood out in such contrast to the others that newcomers to town were constantly pointing at it and laughing, for a moment. When the Mick saw it, his square face lighted up for just a second. He looked ten years younger.

"Bill Squibb!" he murmured aloud.

Then the expression faded from his face as he carefully guided his horse through the traffic to one of the hitching posts set at intervals along the whole length of the street.

The sign which was crudely lettered across the entire front of the one-story frame building read:

"YE OLDE WHISKE SHOPPE"

Olde Bille Squibbe, Prop.

The room into which the Mick entered was almost a hundred feet deep and only twenty feet wide. Along each wall was a bar, and behind both bars the bartenders worked almost elbow to elbow. The only drinks served were straight whiskeys with water in them, or on the side. The space between the bars was an almost solid mass of men, and it took the Mick five minutes to work his way through them toward a door in the rear of the place

which appeared to lead to an office, or perhaps living quarters.

Because it was a place for men to drink, and only that, the percentage of tightness was high but of drunkenness, very low. The Mick, knowing Squibb of old, easily picked out four bouncers, guns at hips, who were mingling with the crowd.

When he had almost reached the door, a section of the top panel opened and framed a bespectacled, scholarly face. Squibb surveyed his domain briefly. The Mick was within five feet of the door and just free from the fringe of the crowd, when Squibb saw him. A myriad of wrinkles suddenly appeared in the long horseface, as Squibb said conversationally, "The Mick himself. Come in."

The door opened, but Squibb did not come out. Nor did either man offer to shake hands.

"Hi, Bill," the Mick said. "Nice place you've got."

Squibb shut the door, and said, "Twenty-four hours a day is too much. Sit down."



"Hear you've got Coda right where you want him," Bill Squibb said.



THE Mick sat down in the horsehair-upholstered chair and glanced at the copies of Shakespeare and Plato on the round table in the middle of the room, and then at the stove in one corner and the neatly made cot in another.

"Same old Bill," he said.

Squibb brought a bottle of whiskey and two tumblers from the shelf and set them on the table. From the low starched collar to the high button shoes, he was dressed to walk down any Eastern city street. His thick spec-

tacles gave his eyes the appearance of preternatural acuteness.

"I don't suppose you want a job," he said.

"Not your kind, thanks."

"Hear you've got Coda right where you want him," Squibb said, handing the Mick a straight drink. The Mick gestured a toast and sipped it slowly, as though it were wine.

"Did him a couple of favors," he said. "There's something I want from you though, Bill."

Squibb sat down and smoothed his thinning, neatly parted white hair.

"You broke?" he asked.

"Yes, but I'm not speaking of money. I want the straight of Coda and this town."

The glance that darted at the Mick was like a quick beam of electricity, as though all the voltage in Squibb had been compressed and concentrated into it.

"You working for the government?" he asked.

"Nobody but myself."

"After anybody?"

"No. I want in the oil business."

"Decided to make yourself some money," nodded Squibb. "I told you that when you were working for me in El Paso. It's good to be able to handle a gun, but it's no profession."

"That's right."

The Mick took off the sweat-stained little sombrero, and placed it on the floor beside him. His sandy hair was so thick that the part in it was merely a slight furrow which did not reach the scalp. The hair stood up almost straight and made him look taller with his hat off.

"What do you want to know?" Squibb asked.

"Precisely."

"First, how much weight does Coda really throw around here?"

"All there is, son. Before he ever sunk a well he had all that northern and western acreage tied up, and now he's got the eastern stuff that he proved up this afternoon. The rockhounds all say the stuff south of town is no good."

"Fellow named Slade accused him of stealing most of it," the Mick said.

Again that shaft of light shot from Squibb's eyes.

"Still getting around, I see," he said. "This is the straight of it. Slade and some other fellows put together and leased all that eastern acreage from the Negroes, odd Indians and poor white trash that had been located on it in homesteads. Then Coda and his city thugs and some plain, ordinary frontier badmen went around and persuaded these people to sign a paper saying that Slade and his partners had got the leases under duress. Coda then got the same folks to sign new leases with him. Coda's the one that used the duress—everything from a little cash money to threats, and there was a couple of cabins burned down and some owners beaten, just as an example."

The Mick gazed thoughtfully at the plank ceiling.

"The law, 'specially this Territory law, takes a long time," he said.

"And Coda would win in the long run," Squibb said. "So Coda, and any investors he may have back East, has leases on what there

is proven, or likely to be proven, in this territory. And that's why he isn't so popular, and may become less so."

"He tried to make me his bodyguard."

"He's got his gang, and I think he's scared, but he shows off by walking around unarmed, so nobody can shoot him."

"He seems to have plenty of guts, in some ways. What's wrong with him?"

"The Great-I-Am stuff, son," Squibb said, tasting his drink. "Here's the layout. He's got all the acreage, and he's got wells, but the refinery over on the railroad isn't finished yet, and until it is he's got nowhere to sell his oil. And he won't sublease any part of his holdings to Standard or any of the big companies. So the boom, as you might say, is a boom on futures instead of what's actually taking place. Everybody knows the oil is here, and that some day there'll be a thousand wells, and work and money for everybody. But meantime almost everybody's just marking time. And they're beginning to sense that Coda, using only his own capital, will have to spread out very slowly, even after he starts getting cash for his oil."

The Mick gazed at the ceiling and thought it out. Finally he said, "If really big capital had a piece of the field, they'd start developing on a big scale right away."

"Exactly. The refinery would have been built long before now, big storage tanks in, and the boom would be real instead of on futures. So the folks here in town figure Coda is holding them back from the big money, see?"

The Mick nodded, still looking at the ceiling.

"And that isn't all," Squibb said. "He's so hellbent on being God around here that he even brought some of his old pals down from New York. I don't know how much of a place Coda owns in the joints along this street. What I do know is that they're run big-city style, which means a man can't raise hell in a nice, clean way."

The Mick looked at Squibb, and that crooked little smile lit up his freckled face. The curtains over his eyes parted, and they smiled too.

"If there's one subject I ought to be an expert on, it's joints," he said.



SQUIBB'S face was suddenly a maze of wrinkles, although his wide, straight mouth did not appear to have smiled. The Mick went on.

"You mean the girls roll the drunks, and the wheels are braced and the dice loaded, and all the rest of it?"

"Precisely."

"A half-breed named Red Joe that's awful good with a gun seems to hate Coda especially. Know why?"

"I don't know what may have been between

them," Squibb said carefully. "But I do know that Coda got thousands of acres of Indian-owned land—that's the northern stuff—tied up which he says plain that he isn't going to drill for years. Slipped it through Washington somehow. So the Indians are sore, too."

"If they had their land, other capital would lease it and drill right away," the Mick said.

"Exactly," said Squibb. "It's downright ironical, son, that Donn Coda, with guts enough to wilicat this field, and ego enough to want to be undisputed monarch of it in preference to making more money faster, is going to be hated by the people he's already made some money for because he isn't making them more."

"I'm not very good at words," the Mick smiled. "But I know what you mean. Can I have another drink?"

"That's what the bottle's for."

"Where does this Slade live?"

The Mick was pouring himself a drink, so he didn't see the third recurrence of that piercing look from Squibb's eyes.

"It's around town that Slade tried to kill Coda and you stopped him," he said.

"That isn't what I want to see him about."

Squibb held out his glass for the Mick to freshen.

"I'm not asking, but I'm curious," he said.

The younger man stared into Squibb's thick glasses, and the curtains over his eyes were pulled aside again. Frankly and without dissimulation, he was measuring Squibb, and the saloon keeper looked back at him without blinking.

Finally the cold stare in the Mick's eyes turned into warmth.

"I'd like to have you with me," he said.

"And Coda?"

"No, me, if I can swing it."

"Planning to play both ends against the middle?"

"In a way. What I figure is that Coda is organized, and Slade and his bunch and the Indians aren't."

Squibb pursed his thin lips. "A man might

get quite a ways in this town if he followed that line of thought, and word got around that he was the best man with two guns a reasonably good judge like myself ever saw."

"You think that's important?"

"Son, there's more bad 'uns to the square foot in the population of this territory in general, and Sewell in particular, than I ever saw or heard of. And a lot of them are really good. Willy Weston is here, for one, and the Apache Kid, and Bert Rose and more of the same. Those that haven't heard of the Mick—which probably means no one—ought to hear about him quick."

For a second or two the Mick's young face looked old. "A man would think that I've never done anything but shoot a few gunmen before they shot me."

"Well," said Squibb, "you haven't really done anything much that wasn't based on those shooting irons of yours, regardless of working for the law, or as a bodyguard, or for me. I'm glad to see you're raising your sights."

"You're in," the Mick said. "Now, where does Slade live?"

"Go right on down to the western end of the main street where it turns into a road and forks, take the righthand fork, and it's the only three-story house—maybe the fifth or sixth one down."

"I'll eat first. Coda's got me staked at the hotel, or so he says."

"If you need anything I've got, within reason, let me know."

"I'll drop in after I see Slade. Adios."

CHAPTER IV

KEEP THE DECK IN SIGHT



THE steady hum of Sewell, and the louder buzz of Ye Olde Whiske Shoppe had become so familiar to the Mick that when he made his way through the crowd between the two bars, it did not seem unusual that

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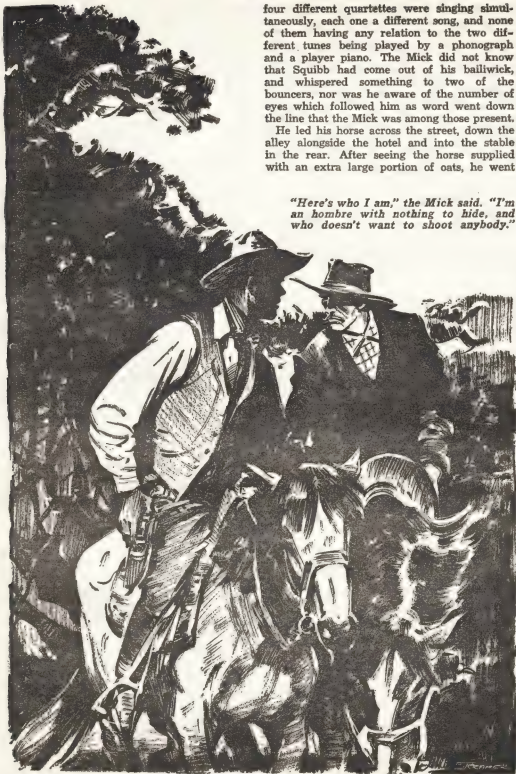
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GROOMS THE HAIR

four different quartettes were singing simultaneously, each one a different song, and none of them having any relation to the two different tunes being played by a phonograph and a player piano. The Mick did not know that Squibb had come out of his balliwick, and whispered something to two of the bouncers, nor was he aware of the number of eyes which followed him as word went down the line that the Mick was among those present.

He led his horse across the street, down the alley alongside the hotel and into the stable in the rear. After seeing the horse supplied with an extra large portion of oats, he went

"Here's who I am," the Mick said. "I'm an hombre with nothing to hide, and who doesn't want to shoot anybody."



in the rear entrance of the hotel and joined a line of some fifty men and women leaning against the wall of the dining room, waiting for seats.

Coda and three companions were eating at one of the few small tables. Ninety percent of the clientele was fed at long tables seating twenty or more. Two of the men with Coda looked like middle-aged, practical oilmen and the third, red-headed, thin and nervous, looked like what he was—the Apache Kid from the Big Bend of Texas. The Mick had never seen him before, but there was no mistaking the jug ears, wavy hair and almost colorless eyes which entered into every description of the wandering professional badman.

The Mick did not look directly at the Coda table, and felt rather than saw the concentrated looks from Coda and his companions. They were still dawdling over their coffee, despite the number of customers waiting, when the Mick finished steak, potatoes and pie, washed down with milk. He was not surprised that the Apache Kid was lounging alongside the alley when he rode out to the street, or that the light-eyed gunman mounted and followed him at a discreet distance.

The Mick waited until he had reached the fork in the road and there was little traffic, before turning his horse and riding straight back toward the Kid. Finally he brought his horse to a stop and let the Kid close the twenty-foot gap between them.

"Know where Slade lives?" the Mick asked. "No," said the Kid, and his almost-white eyes made the Mick shiver because of the fixed stare in them.

"We might as well ride along together and get a few little items straightened out," the Mick said.

"O.K."

The Mick turned his horse and they rode side by side for fifty yards before the Mick said, staring straight ahead, "What were Coda's orders to you?"

"Who the hell do you think you are?" the Apache Kid said, his voice almost feminine in its timbre and register.

The Mick pulled his horse to a stop, and with his left hand brought the other man's mount up short.

"Here's who I am," he said. "I'm an hombre with nothing to hide, and who doesn't want to shoot anybody. I hope you don't figure you've got to show off how tough you are. I'm going to see Slade, to hear his side of the story, and I'm seeing Coda tomorrow to hear his, and I want in the oil business. If all you've got to do is find out what I'm up to, that's it. So you might as well travel back and tell Coda. I don't like to be followed."

The Apache Kid rolled a cigarette, thin face twitching a little with a nervous tic.

"All right," he said finally. "Just one thing, Mick."

"Yes?"

"There's only one side to be on in this town. That's Coda's. If you go on the other, we got to shoot it out sometime—I know that. Both of us scart to death."

"I'll tell the boss tomorrow what side I'm on."

"O.K. See you tomorrow."



THE Apache Kid galloped off through the red-shot darkness, and the Mick walked his horse slowly toward the lighted windows of the three-story house, a few hundred yards ahead of him. He wanted things simple and above-board. And, he figured soberly, it would be the best strategy too. Red Joe had something in mind, and so did old Slade probably, and certainly Coda was as devious as they came. All a man could do was play it straight, and keep the deck in sight at all times.

That direct methods had become a shock in Sewell was evidenced by the expression on the face of the comfortably stout woman who opened the front door.

"Mr. Slade live here?" the Mick asked civilly.

The woman's knowledgeable eyes looked down at his holsters.

"It'd be to his advantage to see me," he said.

"Come in and set," she replied, and let him into a hallway containing a mirrored coat and hatrack and two straight chairs. He sat down in one of the chairs. Somehow he avoided the impression of discomfort, something that perhaps no one but the Mick could have managed.

The woman went down the hall and disappeared into a room at the end, closing the door behind her. As she opened it up, the Mick could hear a burst of masculine conversation. In a second, she reappeared and beckoned to him.

As he approached the door, the smell of a good country kitchen, mingled with smoke and whiskey, prepared him for what he saw.

Around the dining table, which had been stretched to its utmost length, sat fourteen men. There were three gallon jugs of white corn whiskey within convenient reach and the air was heavy and befouled with pipe-smoke. Slade sat at one end of the table. At the other end, the Mick saw the largest Mexican sombrero he could remember encountering resting firmly on the head of a tiny dried-up man with a white goatee.

He appraised the men briefly, as they did him.

They looked like farmers, not cattlemen, mostly. Three or four had on coats and vests and neckties, and could have been Sewell businessmen.

"Well, what's on your mind, stranger?" in-

quired the little old man with the goatee. He wore no collar, but there were studs in the front and back of his white shirt. Over the shirt, his vest swung open, revealing a deringer stuck in his belt.

"If I know the Mick, what's on his mind is out-figuring everyone else in Sewell," someone said.

The men at the table turned toward the back door, and Red Joe eased into the room and smiled at the Mick.

"I've been here some time," said Red Joe quietly. "I was invited."

"What's on my mind," said the Mick calmly, "is getting cut in on this whole field."

A big, fattish young man with keen little eyes set in folds of putty-colored flesh, laughed loudly. He wore two guns and had a silk scarf tucked inside the neck of a loud and expensive plaid shirt.

"You're working for Coda, and you expect a percentage?" he said sarcastically.

"I'm working for myself," the Mick said evenly. He looked around the table slowly. "And maybe I'll be working for you."

Around the table, the glances that met his were equivocal.

"I know how Coda got that Eastern acreage."

He looked up to meet the eyes of Red Joe.

"What you doing here, Joe?" he asked.

"Sort of doin' a little representing for the Indians." The frowzy little half-breed smiled. "They don't know it yet."

"With you and me heading up an outfit, maybe Coda's gunmen won't be too tough," the Mick suggested.



FOR a moment, there was complete silence around the table. Mrs. Slade stood with her ample proportions pressed against the closed door.

Slade leaned forward. The Mick noticed that the job of removing the petroleum had not been too complete. There was an odd shadow effect on his features from it.

"That calls for more talk," Slade said. "You been playin' both sides so far."

"I don't want any sides till I find out what the stakes are," the Mick said evenly. "Listen, caballeros, I know Coda's got a bunch of men, and maybe some women, he's brought down from New York to run these joints in town. He's got a bunch of oilmen working for him, too. And he's got the advantage over you because he's organized and you aren't, and the Indians aren't."

"Organized for what?" piped the little man with the goatee.

The big young man's eyes narrowed still more now, watching the Mick.

"Ever head of the Vigilantes?" asked the Mick. "Cleaned up San Francisco until the



"Well, what's on your mind, stranger?" inquired the little old man with the goatee.

vice went straight. We do the same; then we get our acreage back."

"Talk, talk," murmured the young man.

"Not with an organization, it isn't," the Mick said calmly. "How many men in this town can be depended on to act together against Coda?"

"Mebbe a hundred, plus a couple hundred ranchers and fellers that will do what they're told—farmhands, punchers and such," the wispy older said.

"Then let's get 'em together, secret-like, tomorrow night, everybody to keep their mouths shut," the Mick said.

"What good's cleaning up the town goin' to do?" inquired the young man.

"By running out the thieves and gunmen and crooked gamblers, part of Coda's backing disappears," the Mick said. "I did a couple of favors for Coda, so I figure on taking a job with him, and that'll let me know what's going on there."

"Then what?" asked Slade.

"Then," said the Mick, "we put all the cards on the table, and get you back your acreage. He's taken advantage of this Territory law long enough. Now it's your turn."

"There's Willy Weston, and the Apache Kid, and a lot of good men with a lot of notches in their guns around here," the old man said.

"And a lot of 'em sore at Coda too, for holdin' up the boom around here," the Mick

said. "We tell 'em that as soon as we get control of the acreage, we give the drilling rights to some of the big companies that'll get started pronto—"

"And maybe a lot of the scum around here'll be on our side!" roared a short man with a merry porcine face and enormous shoulders. He slapped the table with his hand. "Have a drink, Mick—that's your monicker?"

The Mick had been aware of the conspicuous lack of hospitality in not offering him a drink on his arrival.

"That's right," he said accepting the glass which was handed him. "And with such good hands with guns as aren't on our side—"

"Not me," said Red Joe softly, still standing at the back door through which he had entered.

The Mick set his drink down carefully.

"We'll do our best on the Indian acreage too," he said moderately. "And those that aren't with us are agin us, Joe."

"Have it any way you like," the Indian said, eyes alert, his hands at his sides with fingers stiff.

"What's on your mind?"

"That's my business."



THE room was quiet as death, and motionless as a photograph.

"There's been a lot of private business talked here," the Mick said. "How about telling us a little about yours?"

"Coda's got the legal right to the Indian lands around here," Joe said, and suddenly his mouth was twisting and the black eyes hot with hate. "Him and the thieving Indian agent and the bastards in Washington. The Indians got their own methods, and what we do to Coda ain't nobody's business but our own."

"Maybe," said the Mick quietly. "We've been on opposite sides before, Joe, and you near killed me this afternoon. I sort of thought we'd play along together for a change."

Joe looked at him steadily.

"I'm leading the Indians, and we're playing alone," he said.

"Against Coda?"

"Against everyone."

"Anything in your mind that might spoil our play?"

Red Joe's black eyes stared again into the Mick's.

"I ain't sayin'," he said. "The Indians have been took, and good, over and over again. This time mebbe they'll do the talkin'."

The Mick stepped back a little, until nobody was behind him. Red Joe's back was to the open door.

"One word about what's been said here, or even if we meet on opposite sides in a knock-down drag-out, and it's me and you, Joe."

The Indian returned his long slow look.

"Just me and you," the Mick repeated slowly. There was a long moment of silence. Red Joe's face at that moment was a reflection of the concentrated hate of all the red men in the country.

"O.K. *Adios*, and good luck," he said. "You wouldn't shoot me in the back, and I don't git shot from the front—ordinarily."

Deliberately he turned and walked out through the back door. He appeared six inches taller than when he had come in.

"We got to work fast," the Mick said. "I want a sixteenth royalty on your acreage, in return for my services as organizer, gunman and spy. Does that make sense?"

"I'll say it does!" roared the older fat man. "We needed the spark—and somebody capable of shooting it out with Weston and Rose and the rest, when and if there's a showdown. My name's Grady. This young feller in the long shirt is Beef Blakely, Goaty Gibbs is the one at the end of the table—"

Man after man stood up and shook hands as Grady went the round of introductions. When he had finished, the Mick said, "Now, let's get down to hardpan. First, we get people we can trust to go into town, to the joints, and pretend they're drunk and loaded with dough. We get the evidence tonight—"

Slade interrupted him. "We've all got plenty of evidence now. After all, we've been knocking around Sewell for months."

"So much the better," said the Mick. "Tomorrow night we organize—with every man we can get present. Then—"

The "thens" in the hardpan took four hours to thrash out, and it was two o'clock in the morning when the little group of farmers and ranchers rode off to their dispersed holdings, all of them outside the known limits of the pool. The irony of the oil business had put the pool, except for the Tubal lands, almost exclusively beneath farms close to the town of Sewell, which were held almost entirely by Mexicans, poor whites and Indians who wanted to be near enough to town to get hold of liquor easily.

"I'm spending the night in town," Blakely announced. "Riding my way, Mick?"

"That's right."



BLAKELY, the Mick soon learned, was a cattleman in a small way, and the operator in Sewell of a market inherited from his father.

Having confided this much, he kept the Mick busy for the rest of the ride dodging direct answers to questions about his past, present and particularly his future.

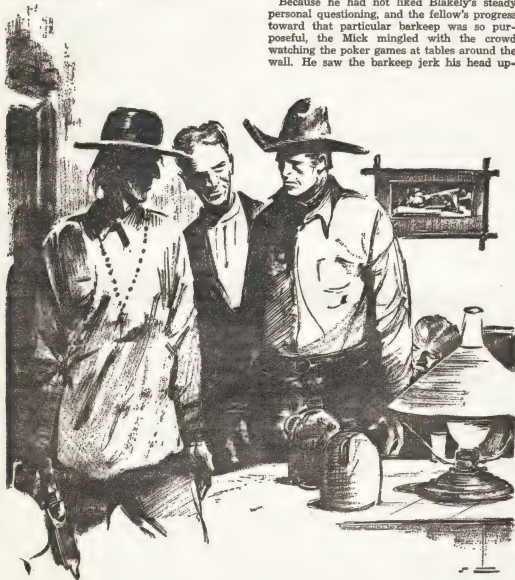
It developed that Blakely was dropping into the Palace Hotel before going on to the room behind his shop in which he slept when in town, so the two men entered the crowded

lobby together. A double row of cots rimmed the walls and each was occupied by a fully dressed man. A symphony of snores filled the room.

"They rent 'em in three eight-hour shifts," Blakely said. "If Coda got you a room, you got a room. This joint is run according to what he tells 'em." He gestured at the roaring bar which adjoined the lobby. "Drink?"

Because the Mick had only two dollars and could not stand a round of his own, he refused. Nevertheless, as Blakely said good-night and went through the swinging doors, the Mick watched him. Then he went to the doors himself and saw the cattleman-merchant elbow his way with loud greetings to various customers toward a bartender with a cast in one eye and long, thin mustachios.

Because he had not liked Blakely's steady personal questioning, and the fellow's progress toward that particular barkeep was so purposeful, the Mick mingled with the crowd watching the poker games at tables around the wall. He saw the barkeep jerk his head up-



"Adios, and good luck," Red Joe said. "You wouldn't shoot me in the back, and I don't get shot from the front—ordinarily."

ward, say a few words, and then return to his ceaseless duties. Blakely did not even have a drink but left the room in the same eager, determined way in which he had entered it.

The Mick was conscious of the fact that he was being identified by various men. What made him certain that between the roughnecks at the well and the gossip started by Bill Squibb he was already well-known, was a jovial drunk wearing spectacles, whose clothes were splotted with oil, who called to him, "A fellow that saves Donn Coda twice deserves two drinks. How about it, young 'un?"

The Mick smiled and shook his head. By the time he had reached the ornately mustachioed barkeeper he had responded to the drunken greetings of several patrons who all seemed more than eager for the company of the man who had saved Coda's life. All appeared, by their clothing, to be technical oilmen of every stature from roughneck to head driller.

The Mick gestured to the bartender and whispered into his ear.

"You know who I am. Working for Coda on the quiet. Which room does Beef Blakely go to?"

Without hesitation, the bartender said, "The company room."



The Mick went out to the small desk, and a night clerk who must have been eighty years old and was more than a little drunk replied to his questions.

"Your room's 210, young feller, until eight in the mornin' when new customers arrive.

Company room's 304, and you're lucky not to be in it."

The Mick took his key, and as he went down the third floor hallway, there was something about him which resembled a cat on the prowl. He stopped in front of 304 and listened. He heard the murmur of Blakely's deep voice, and then a high voice which made the hackles rise along his spine. The words were indistinguishable.

He wondered whether he was going to be lucky about the door. He wasn't. It was locked. He tried the big standard key to 210, working with infinite care. Whoever had locked 304 had taken out the key. And the Mick's worked.

He flung it open suddenly, and in a split second had made a sort of stand broadjump,



The Mick's guns cracked simultaneously. The Kid spun halfway around and crumpled like an empty sack across the cot.

six feet inside the room, flinging the door shut with his left hand. His right was next to his gun.

Simultaneously, Beef Blakely and the Apache Kid were on their feet. They had been sitting on the edge of the farthest cot of a row of five on the righthand side of the spacious room. A similar column of cots was on the Mick's left. The room, he was to learn, was maintained by the Coda Development Company for the convenience of various clients and employees.



THE Apache Kid stood bent forward a little, thin nostrils flaring like those of a startled horse. His long, thin arms were crooked slightly and his oversized hands

very close to his guns. He was flexing his fingers, and his pale eyes did not blink.

Beef Blakely, in the middle of the room at the end of the cot, suddenly relaxed and jerked his head at a bottle on the dresser in the exact middle of the back wall.

"Coda put you in this room?" he asked, and his voice shook a little. He stepped forward and to his right, away from the Kid.

"Stay where you are," the Mick said.

The curtains over his eyes had parted again, and they were like clear blue-tinted glass.

"Why?" bluffed Blakely.

"Because it looks like maybe I'll have to kill you both," the Mick said softly.

The Apache Kid exhaled. "You drunk?" he said thinly.

"Not too drunk to know Blakely's working for Coda, and has had plenty of time to tell you everything he knows, and you haven't had time to get it to Coda," the Mick said carefully.

The Apache Kid rubbed his hands along the sides of his jeans. Like the Mick, he was in the working costume of a cowpoke, except for those special bone-butted six-shooters.

The Mick backed slowly toward the door. There was sweat on his upper lip, and the palms of his hands were moist.

"I ain't armed," Blakely said in that shaking voice. He patted the pockets of his capacious trousers as he went on, "And I and the Apache Kid got a deal on—"

Then his right hand, at the entrance to his pocket, moved fast. At the same instant, the Apache Kid's two hands darted to the butts of his guns. As Blakely leaped to the Mick's left, to separate himself as far as possible from the Kid, he was bringing a stubby Colt automatic out of his pocket.

The Mick's guns cracked simultaneously. Blakely's gun was only half out of his pocket when he fell. The Kid's guns were out and coming up when he spun halfway around and crumpled like an emptied sack across the cot.

The Mick walked forward slowly, smoking guns ready. Both men were dead.

For a moment, his face was as old as the world.

His high heels clicked as he walked out of the room. A half dozen sleep-drugged heads poked out of room doors, although the crack of the guns had been the most minor of additions to the bedlam of Sewell washing through every window and up the stairs from bar and lobby. The Mick spoke clearly.

"I've just killed a couple of fellows in self-defense. I'd thank some of you hombres to go in and see that their guns were out."

In Sewell society, most men slept with their clothes on, and now a dozen pairs of more or less bleary eyes were surveying the Mick from various points in the hall. The Mick prudently put his back against the wall.

"Beef Blakely and the Apache Kid," he said.

At least three voices, in various stages of astonishment, repeated, "The Apache Kid?"

The men looked at each other silently. Then a handsome young man with olive skin, whose riding clothes were not mussed, said quietly, "Both at once?"

"They both drew at once."

"I see. I'm a geologist. Bransom's the name. I'll lead a few witnesses in there and tell Coda—he's my boss, too—what we see."

The Mick did not move as a dozen men trooped into the room, and out again within thirty seconds. Bransom nodded to the Mick as he shut the door. The Mick walked down the stairs, unlocked 210, left the door open until he had lighted the lamp, closed it, and locked it. It was also supplied with a hook and eye, which he closed and tested, finding that the handle of his pocket-knife would wedge into the eyelet. No one could lift the hook from the outside now.

He sat down on the bed and thought things over. He was dead for sleep, and might as well get some. He dragged the mattress off the bed, placed it in front of the door, removed his boots and pulled the blankets over him. Then every muscle automatically relaxed, and he fell into a refreshing, half-conscious coma.

There was an almost continuous parade of mostly drunken guests of the hotel marching and counter-marching past his door, all night long. But so far as he knew, no one stopped.

CHAPTER V

A MINUTE PAST MIDNIGHT



WHEN he arose, two hours past sunup, he went down the back stairs and out to the stables where two Negro grooms rolled their eyes at him and leaped to obey with such alacrity that he got his first premoni-

tion of his status in Sewell. He saw to his horse, got his razor from his saddlebags and shaved with the aid of a tin basin and a cracked little square of mirror.

When he walked into the dining room—as crowded at seven A.M. as it had been the night before—he left a wake of whispering silence behind him, and four men whose coffee was unfinished gestured him to their table as they got up to leave.

Three were in ordinary business suits; the fourth in whipcord riding breeches, tan silk shirt and an expensive coat sweater. He wore pince-nez, and was possessed of calm green eyes and an expression as keen as a fox terrier. All four looked like money. The keen-faced man turned to the Mick.

"Man named Gibbs suggested we get together. Don't act as though we were talking business. My office is over the Planter's Rest. Be there at noon."

"Name?" asked the Mick.

"Frontier Refineries, Incorporated."

"Check."

The Mick ate steak and fried potatoes and drank slightly less than a quart of coffee before proceeding across the street to Coda's office. The lower floor of the building was a storehouse for oil equipment, and the street frontage of the building possessed no entrance whatever. The Mick went down the alley and found the entrances facing a rutted little street which paralleled the main artery of the town. He followed half a dozen people up the outside stairway and into a long room.

A ten-foot corridor bisected it and led to a single door in the partition extending the width of the building. On each side of the aisle were rows of wooden benches, now occupied by fifty or more men and a few women, all of whom were waiting to see someone. Behind each row of benches were low railings, and in the railed-off spaces were desks. Those nearer the entrance were occupied by clerks and bookkeepers; those toward the rear held neat signs reading: *Head Driller, Field Superintendent, Production Manager, Chief Geologist* and other titles pertaining to the executive end of the oil business. The door in the partition was lettered: *Offices of THE CODA DEVELOPMENT COMPANY, Private.*

Since no one told him different, the Mick walked unhurriedly to that door, opened it and found himself in a wide, shallow reception room with various doors opening off it and three armed men who were certainly bodyguards swapping bandinage with three young women who did more talking than typing, probably because they were better at the former.

Complete silence greeted the Mick's entrance. He broke it by saying, "I got a date with Donn Coda. Am I early?"

The farthest girl fluffed her shiny blond hair, arose with a little wiggle and said, "I'll see."

The Mick stood immobile, relaxed and leaning slightly against the partition. The three men with shiny hair, gold teeth and sallow faces shrieked "city" audibly, as did the girls. They carried their guns in the side-pockets of their coats and would shoot from the back, the Mick thought and probably not too straight, either.

He could not find fault, however, with the flattering scrutiny to which he was being subjected. The blond girl stuck her head out of a door at the end of the room and said, "If you're the Mick, come on in, handsome."

She looked and smiled sideways as he passed her. He entered a big office on the front corner of the building. There were windows on two sides, and in a corner between those two sides, Coda was seated behind a big, battered desk set cater-cornered to the walls. The rear half of the office was occupied principally by a huge table made of planks set on saw horses and covered with maps. Other maps lined the walls. A dozen plain wooden armchairs were set along the walls nearest Coda's desk and a generous supply of bright brass cuspidors were set at strategic points.

Coda leaned back in his swivel chair and put his trim feet on the desk.

"Been kind of helling around town, haven't you?" he said with his thin white smile. "You needn't sit down, because we won't be long."

The Mick's eyes became blue-black as he walked toward the desk, gestured a hello and calmly pulled a chair into a position exactly in front of Coda's desk. The oilman watched him, narrow eyes as bright as those of a snake. He was dressed to go out into the field, evidently—gray flannel shirt, gray trousers tucked into cowboy boots, and a gaudy neckerchief knotted at his throat in big-city style.

"I'll need a little time," the Mick said evenly. "What's on your mind?"



CODA studied him as he reached forward and took a long, very thin cigar out of a box on his desk. He did not offer one to his visitor, but lit his own deliberately, eyeing the Mick over the operation.

"I'll let you get away with it," he said finally. He leaned back restfully and put one leg over the other. "Get this, Mick. You saved my life twice and now the debt is paid."

"There wasn't any debt."

"Donn Coda never owes anybody anything. When you roped me and let Slade go, that paid for you drawing on him."

"On that basis," drawled the Mick, "what's my pay for dragging you off the derrick?"

Coda put his arms behind his head, like a slowly coiling snake and said calmly, "That you're still alive, and won't be dead until a minute past twelve tonight."

"Deadline for me leaving town, I suppose?"

"Right."

"Blakely and the Apache Kid drew first."

"Naturally. What were you doing out at Slade's?"

"Looking over the offer of a job."

"Yeah? What kind of a job?"

"Killing you," the Mick lied.

Coda's guarded eyes, the lids hooding them, stared into the Mick's, and he smiled a little. Then he smoothed his patent-leather hair. There were tiny beads of perspiration on his forehead. He yawned and put his hands behind his head again, continuing his role of nonchalance and relaxation.

"Much in it for you?" he asked.

"Five hundred, and a percentage of something."

"If you did it now you wouldn't get away with it."

"I don't kill men for any amount of dinero. Besides, they don't need to hire anybody. See this?"

He held up his bullet-scarred sleeve and told Coda about it, without mentioning Red Joe.

"And it wasn't Slade that made the offer, or his syndicate," he said. "It was one man."

"There aren't many men in that bunch who have five hundred dollars now," Coda said. "You killed the Apache Kid and Blakely so neither of them could talk. If you're telling the truth, they wouldn't have drawn on you. There are a few more men as good as the Apache Kid around town working for me, and they don't mind killing for money. Twelve-one tonight, Mick. And a hundred for telling me what you just did."

The Mick stood up, fingering the two silver dollars in his pocket.

"No," he said. "And you're a fool, Coda."

Coda smiled. "Look who's talking," he said, "and who he's talking to."

"What's more," the Mick went on equably, "you got no size. Whole hog or none—that's you. Somebody's gonna kill you so's this field can really boom—and boom now. You could stay alive with a fair percentage of all acreage for yourself, and big company money taking the risks and getting the work done—*face*. A king can't enjoy anything, Coda, after he's dead."

"Twelve-one tonight, Mick."

"O.K. I'll be looking around town up to then."

"I wouldn't try shooting anybody."

"My tender heart has been my ruination."

"Me too," smiled Coda.

The Mick strolled out of the office, through reception rooms and out into the blinding, dusty sunlight. It was not yet ten o'clock, but on the second floor over the Planter's Rest, a jovial young man with a Harvard accent and a ribald eye shook hands with him, opened a door and ushered him inside with the words, "The Mick, Chief."

Carpenters and plasterers and a painter here and there were swarming over the offices of the refining company like so many busy ants. The office of the man who looked like a fox terrier had evidently just been finished, and smelled of wet paint, plaster, new wood and pipe smoke. He came out from behind a desk piled high with papers, and gestured at a divan. The Mick had seen some pretty flossy offices everywhere from Kansas to Mexico City, and this one stacked up well with all but the most ornate, like those of the governor of Texas and Porfirio Diaz. His host shook hands, offered a drink which was refused, and sat down alongside the younger man.

"What do they call you beside the Mick?" he asked.

"Dash Tomick. Short for Dashiell. And you?"

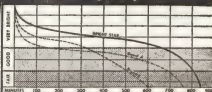
"Lowell Coffin."

Because of the amount of noise which washed into the room from all sides, conversation was in loud tones, but inaudible five feet away from the divan. The Mick explained his reasons

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for being ahead of time and concluded, "You wanted to see me."

"So did the others, but I know what's in their minds," Coffin said, each clipped syllable precise as those of the Mick were slightly slurred in the manner of the South. "Let's not fence, Mr. Tomick."

"Suits me."

"My company is spending a lot of money on a half-finished refinery, because we had every reason to believe this field would be developed promptly, and our geologists and engineers were sure the pool was a big one. Instead, Coda has turned out to be a pathological case who wants to do everything himself. We've got to finish our construction—got the stuff down here, can't lose our investment, or leave it without a roof on."



EVERY word from Coffin was another nail driven briskly and without wasted motion into a neat structure he was building. He leaned a little toward the Mick, and used the stem of his pipe to drive in his last point.

"We're interested in maximum production here, as quickly as possible."

"I can see that."

"Gibbs tells me that you're a man who can outshoot any gunman on Coda's side, and that your reputation and ideas have crystallized and brought alive the resentment of local investors against Coda's methods. I know your plans."

The Mick spoke with deliberation.

"You're interested in us getting back that eastern acreage, and the Indian acreage to the north, so your refinery can run. What's the interest of the fellows you were with?"

"They represent the three biggest oil companies. They've made a deal to pool anything good they can pick up down here. Gibbs says that if the local syndicate get back their leases, they'll sublease on the usual royalty basis to the big company combine. That means to those men."

"That goes for the eastern stuff. The Indian acreage is different."

"Tied up with the approval of the United States government, as recommended by the local Indian agent who was bribed by Coda. Coda's got one year to sink a wildcat, two years to sink three, and five years to start developing. And he won't lease an acre."

"Your outfit, which seems large, and those big companies, ought to have some influence in Washington."

"They have. But it's a long process. Even your deal is a long process."

The Mick stared into eyes as bright and hard as diamond drills.

"By ordinary legal procedure, you mean."

Lowell Coffin did not blink an eye. Instead, he took off his pince-nez and fingered his little brush mustache.

"I knew we'd understand each other," he said. "The crux of the question is Coda. There appears to be only one way to force him to listen to reason. Money doesn't talk to him."

"What does, you think?"

"Fear," Coffin said deliberately.

"Where do I come in?"

"Right there."

"What you mean is my guns?"

The statement was flat and unemotional, and Coffin's reply was the same.

"We are not advocating murder. We are stating that a man like you, in the service of the proper organization of Vigilantes, redressing the wrongs of the Slade Syndicate and the Indians, would be a powerful influence."

"What you mean is," the Mick said, "that it'll come to open war, and I could kill Coda."

"Justified, because killing or incapacitating one man would settle the question. And our cause makes it perfectly justifiable."

Again that square, freckled face under the disreputable little sombrero was set, the corners of the mouth drawn down.

"I've hired out my guns for a lot of things," he said, "but never for murder."

"Which we are not advocating, except and unless in case of war."

"You're just fooling yourself, Mr. Coffin," the Mick said civilly. "This deal is a lot tougher'n you think—"

"Are you interested?"

"I am. So let's talk my kind of turkey."

"My thought exactly. You said the deal was tougher than I think. Why?"

"The Indians, for one."

Coffin looked at him sharply.

"That hadn't occurred to me. I suppose you know something?"

"There's a half-breed named Red Joe who's been around a lot from Mexico City to Abilene. His guns gave him just about as much social standing as he wanted—and when he's dressed up he isn't bad-looking, either. He hates Coda personally, and has got all it takes to be head of the Indians—"

"Organize them just as you could crystallize the sentiment of the Slade Syndicate and their friends?"

"That's right. And they may be up to some Indian kind of deviltry."

"What do you suggest doing?"

"Getting an Indian—through Bill Squibb maybe—to go out in the Five Tribes territory and see what's in the wind."

"Good idea."

"Next thing is for you to get word to Slade and Gibbs, because maybe I'm being followed. So I want the white men gathered tonight, at a time and place you fellows agree on. I'll

knock around town and size things up, ride out over the prairie far enough to know whether I'm being followed, get rid of anybody doggin' me, and double back to the meeting place."

"It'll take me an hour," Coffin said briskly.

"And if there are any questions about me being here with you, I wanted a job over at the refinery, and we couldn't get together. You have a man tell Bill Squibb the program. I'll pick it up there. Now, there are a few more details—"

CHAPTER VI

TONIGHT OR NEVER



THEY took less than fifteen minutes to get those details into an orderly progression, and then the Mick proceeded through the roaring main street to the emporium of Olde Bille Squibbe. Ten minutes there sufficed to have a young Carlisle-educated Indian on his way to pick up Red Joe's trail—said young Indian being more anxious than anyone else that his compatriots not revert to savagery. He also owned fifty acres of the prospective oil land, which cemented his more lofty principles. Bill Squibb had three shifts of four bouncers each who, although not the best gunmen or rough-and-tumble men in the world, possessed versatile efficiency and diversified experience.

"That brings up a thought," the Mick said as he took leave of Squibb. "See you in an hour."

He roamed from one place to another, and never had he seen a town where even the dancehall girls worked in three shifts, and in which as many couples were dancing at ten in the morning as the same hour at night. The smell of big city Tenderloin pervaded more than half the places—more than three-quarters of the more elaborate ones. Sizing up the croupiers and bartenders; spotting rifles poked through holes in the ceiling over gambling tables; appraising the girls, and analyzing with an expert eye the kind and amount of liquor served, all confirmed what he had already heard.

In any of the Coda-backed places, anything from knockout drops to braced wheels were waiting for the proper customers, and a man would be more likely to get stabbed in the back than shot from the front with a fair shake to go for his own gun. To back up his Willie Westons and Bert Roses, and probably some good tough oilmen, Coda had himself a gang which sort of made the Mick shiver. This was no kind of a Western town, and a curious sort of frontier patriotism in him was seriously affronted.

Not that he didn't sense guarded resentment against the slow development of the big boom everyone knew was coming. Few of these city underworldlings, however, had much of an idea that Coda, and Coda alone, was sitting on the blow-off. It seemed to be the general opinion of the rank and file that he was merely holding out for better terms from the big companies, and for the refinery to be completed.

By the time the Mick was riding out of town, at six o'clock that night, he had reached the conclusion that if there were any way of proving to Coda's own joint-keepers just what Coda's intention were, they might be allies instead of enemies. But all Coda would have to do would be to deny it, and there was no profit in pursuing that line of thought.

The Mick rode ten miles across the open prairie before he was certain that no one was following him. However, a man might be watching him through glasses from the oil-rich hills surrounding Sewell, so he doubled northward behind a second circle of rises, screened by them and the, as yet, moonless night.

He was pleased to be challenged by a man who rose out of the brush on a knoll a full two miles from the appointed rendezvous, and by another concealed by unusually tall grass, a half mile from the large barn on the remote ranch. If all approaches to the Bar-Star ranch had been as carefully covered, and the men from town had taken proper care in slipping away, the projected coup might have a chance of being a surprise.

Only a low murmur came from the barn, so he was stunned for the moment, as much by the spirit as the numbers of the men packed inside. In the light of a half-dozen lanterns, at least two hundred men were squatting on the cleared floor and others looked down from the haymow. Horses snorted in the corral outside, and some milch cows looked on from their stanchions.

Then the Mick's eyes for a brief interval became a clear blue and full of boyish zest. He fingered the two silver dollars in his pocket, and grinned his crooked grin. All the men appeared to be armed except Lowell Coffin and Bill Squibb, and the chances were that Squibb could produce at least one gun, perhaps more, from the tailored clothing made for him by a tailor in Kansas City.



SQUIBB and Goaty Gibbs and Slade got up and came forward to shake hands. The rest eyed him silently, but their wary friendliness and reserved admiration were entities as tangible as was the excitement which washed against the crude walls.

Slade was no more the beaten, desperate roughneck the Mick had watched at the well,

a little more than twenty-four hours before. He held himself erect, and there was a blaze in his eyes and a tilt to his head which indicated a man who could help spearhead a deal. Bill Squibb, as was his custom, stayed in the background and watched other people perform as he had directed, repeating lines, most of which he had written in collaboration with the Mick.

"This is the Mick," Slade said, gesturing a little.

No one said anything, and the crowd gave the effect of a many-headed beast, crouched to spring and waiting for its trainer's signal.

Slade turned toward the Mick and went on, "Squibb and Mr. Coffin kind of gave us a blueprint, and we've all put in our two cents' worth, and I'll tell you what conclusions we come to and see if they jibe with yours."

"Hell, I'm no master mind," the Mick said with that crooked little smile.

"What you got hanging to each side of that belt is worth a lot of minds," Slade said with excited joviality. "Mick, around this town, you're in kind of a funny spot. Anybody could shoot you in the back, but there's a kind of respect that holds 'em off from doing it. You're the man everybody in this town knows is maybe the best man alive with them guns, and that's what makes us think we're on a winner. Your ideas are good, but bein' a champion makes 'em better. And maybe a lot of hombres—some Western men that ain't too spotless but ain't city scum either—will come over on our side, because you're on it . . . So much for so much. First, we move tonight. Within an hour."

The Mick's eyes glowed. "That's the kind of talk I like to hear."

"We were nearly ruind by one spy," Slade reminded him. "Now we got six teams of four good men each, ready and willin' to drift into town and quietly grab Coda, Willie Weston, Bert Rose and three other of the best men with guns on Coda's side—not only men he depends on to fight for him, but men we might persuade to throw in with us."

"How you going to get Coda?" the Mick asked.

"Mr. Coffin will be on the team that goes after him," Slade said.

The precise Bostonian, his pince-nez twinkling in the rays of a lantern, was seated on an overturned milk bucket against one wall. The Mick stepped forward and held out his hand. Coffin took it and said dryly, "Business is business."

And now the Mick saw that along the same wall were the three big-company men, all in riding breeches and boots and flannel shirts, each with one gun sagging in a holster. They looked as much at home in that barn and in those costumes as they had with stickpins in



The precise Bostonian was seated on an overturned bucket against one wall.

their ties in the hotel dining room. This oil business, the Mick thought, was a man's business and for real money.

The wiry little company man next to Coffin fondled his crisply clipped mustache and said in a cultivated British accent, "We are the rest of the Coda team, old boy."

The Mick gave a little gesture of salute, and turned back to Slade. Naturally, Coda could not turn down a conference with these men, who represented the ultimate sources of the money with which Coda would be paid for his oil.

Controlled exultation sprayed from Slade's face as though every pore in his skin was exuding electricity.

"We got a way worked out where we can all drift up behind the hills east of town, and be sure we ain't seen and no warnings given," Slade went on. "As soon as these hombres are delivered to us behind the hills, we leave a guard and the rest of us go to the four leading joints in town, driftin' in peaceable like and drinkin' and gamblin' and kiddin' the girls a little.

"Squibb's boys have got a complete lay-out of each place—back doors, private stairways and the rest, and we got a plan for strikin' hard and fast, and within a matter o' minutes we'll have every dangerous man in each place, and hustle 'em out of town. With us announcin' that Coda and his most dangerous gunmen are already prisoners, and that we're cleanin' up the town and runnin' 'em out, we won't have no trouble."

"Of course," said Bill Squibb as Slade paused to put a chew of tobacco in his mouth, "we all understand that the object of this strategy is to show Coda that there's a revolution in his town. Make him easier to do business with, and deprive him of any hope he may have that he will be rescued by his gang."

"What are we going to do about his oilmen?" the Mick asked.

"Without orders from the boss, they'll do exactly nothing," Squibb said. "Or such is my opinion."

"Then while a few of us are putting papers in front of Coda to sign, the rest will clean up four more places—acting in the open this time," Slade said. "Just attack place after place and ruin it, and keep on until he gives in."

"And I just sit and watch," the Mick said wistfully.

Half a hundred men guffawed. It was a quick, savage laugh, which was as much release from tension as it was merriment.

"By no means," Squibb said. "You will be first, chief persuader of Weston, Rose and Company, second, our Exhibit A that if Coda doesn't make the kind of a deal we want, some of the most skillful guns in the country will be leading his opposition in the only kind of battle recognized in this part of the Oklahoma Territory."

"Sounds good—hell, it sounds perfect," the Mick said thoughtfully. "I got a few questions and then let's get started—earlier than anyone would naturally figure there could be anything afoot."

CHAPTER VII

BLOW-OFF



LESS than an hour later, more than two hundred men, most of them so similarly attired in dungarees, cowboy boots, Stetsons, and at least one gun, as to make them appear almost like a uniformed army, mounted and rode westward in a tightly compact body. Ten miles ahead, the sky was red with the glow of Sewell. The murmur of the town grew from a drone to a continuous low roar, shot with tinny music. They were walking their horses now to avoid the thunder of many hooves, and a mile ahead half a dozen observers on the crest of the hills indicated, by not building a campfire, that the coast was clear. This meant also that the guard on that lone eastern well had been made captive.

Just below the crest of the line of low hills nearest Sewell, all the riders except the kidnap teams dismounted. As the half dozen quartettes spread to drift inconspicuously into Sewell the remainder, as though operated by a single string, crawled the last few feet to the top of the rise on their bellies and lay there looking down into the noisy, red-shot maw of the town. To their right, the crimson banners of the drilling wells flared against the night, and boiler mouths glowed briefly like gargantuan fireflies as their tenders stoked them with quick-burning greasewood.

The Mick took it all in, and his spirit leaped to the dimly sensed significance of those gnomes wrestling untold riches from the bowels of the earth.

He might have lain there for hours, unaware of the passage of time, for despite the circumstances, he was off-guard now. But scarcely a minute had passed, and none of the teams had yet started their drift into town, when it happened.

On the tip of the northern hills, placed there to prove up both sides of them, was a single producing well, the baffle-plates of its iron valve open just far enough to relieve the gas pressure, and feed oil into a pipe leading to a sump.

Suddenly the Mick's eyes focused on a slight activity on the derrick floor. There came the dull boom of an explosion, then the well headed and a great column of oil flung itself toward the sky. Before any man could say anything, or the details of the figures on the derrick floor became distinguishable, a great wave of riders surged over the crest of the northern hills a quarter of a mile away.

And now, so loud that the bellow of Sewell became merely an undertone for it, came a wild chorus of Indian war whoops from at least three hundred copper-colored riders.

No word was necessary among the white men. As one man they dashed to their horses, a few yards away, and mounted. With the Mick—by virtue of his position on the northernmost point of the eastern hills—in the lead, they rode like wildmen toward the horde of Indians whose object was clear: to destroy Coda's field by letting the wells run wild.

Now, punctuating the eerie yelling of the mighty wave of warriors was the drumfire of such guns as they carried, shooting into the air as they started to spread out.

The Mick found Coffin and the three company men riding close to him.

The Englishman yelled, "They crippled the valve with sledges, and I think perhaps stuck dynamite down the hole—"

"The little half-breed must have learned all the tricks while he was working for Coda!" Coffin yelled. If a man can be said to shout calmly, Coffin was that man.

The Mick's eyes focused on the lone little figure of Red Joe, and he had turned his horse to face the braves who split to ride around him. He was gesturing at different wells and his followers, just trotting their horses now, were obeying him like a well-disciplined army.

Then for an instant everything became insignificant except one monstrously beautiful and baleful thing: a great red blaze, starting a few feet above the mouth of the well and mushrooming into a gargantuan flame which lit up the sky for miles.

Then that glow turned into a black cloud, glowing darkly red as the myriad drops of oil spouting from the mouth of the well were consumed in the burning gas.

Stunned by the horror they had wrought, such Indians as were far enough from the terrible heat generated by the fire, fought to control their nervous horses. Others rode like demons to escape the heat until they were all gathered into a turbulent group, silhouetted against the light of the burning well.

And down in the bottom of the great saucer made by the hills the Mick saw that all Sewell, for the moment, had been turned into a still photograph of its living, roaring self.



CONVERSATION was difficult in the bedlam of that fire which could start a destruction of Sewell and the field, more complete than even Red Joe could dream of. Or had he dreamt it? For plainly visible to the oncoming white army, he was gesturing at the other wells, as he drove his horse among his warriors, urging them on.

"Great God!" bellowed the big company men, on the Mick's left. "Throw oil from those other wells into the air and there'll be a curtain of fire that'll eat up everything in this valley!"

"The man's mad!" someone yelled behind the Mick.

Just then it seemed that the Indians, for the first time, could free their minds from the horrendous spectacle of the fire to appraise the importance of the hard-riding army of white men. Red Joe turned, as did all his men, to face the Mick, now only two hundred yards away from him.

The Mick gestured his army to a slow lope, then a walk. This was no time for excitement. Finally, he turned in his saddle and waved the ranchers to a stop. Then alone, he walked his horse forward.

He felt that he knew the thoughts surging and tumbling in the half-breed's mind, as well as though they were his own. The main one would be that there were more than three hundred guns among the two hundred odd white men, and only about half that many among the Indians. Almost half of the braves carried only bows and arrows, tomahawks, and axes and sledges for the purpose of destroying wells. One pack-horse probably carried explosives to help the destruction.

There were some of the thoughts and passions which raged in Red Joe's mind he could never fully know, but he sensed them when he came close enough to distinguish the details of the Indian's face. The bright little black eyes were pools of frustration and hate, the face a graven stone mask of utter venom.

He had dropped the reins of his horse and was letting his arms hang straight downward, elbows crooked just a little. He was as tense as a coiled rattler. Opposite him, twenty feet away, the Mick was relaxed like a watchful cat except for his hands. They were relaxed too, but the fingers were moving slightly, as though subconsciously searching for something.

For the moment it appeared, to the two watchful armies, that not even the fire existed. The attention of more than five hundred men, red and white, was concentrated on those two lone figures. It was a meeting of champions. Except for the Mick's arrival in Sewell, Red Joe would have had his way and destroyed the wells before opposition against the Indians' revenge could be organized.

Suddenly one of the huge humps sprouted fire which spread rapidly until the reservoir was a lake of flame. Burning faggots from the derrick, blown by the force of the gas and the stiff northern breeze, floated through the air like so many emissaries of disaster. Now, streaming from town on foot, horseback and by wagon were most of the inhabitants of the boom town, drawn irresistibly toward the focal point of the revolutionary disaster which was befalling the field and the town.

Even the practical oilmen—the tiny minority which had any real conception of the dimensions of the disaster that an oil well fire could

be—appeared to have forgotten, for the moment, what was happening outside the area in which the Indians and the white men faced each other.

Two more sumps caught fire and then, suddenly, a dull boom made the earth shiver and men's eardrums ring. As though some monstrous candle had been snuffed, the fire glowing through the mushroom of black smoke over the well disappeared.

A charge of dynamite prepared by Red Joe for the destruction of another well had been left on the derrick floor of the burning well, fuse attached and primed for the explosion. It is the gas igniting as it expands a few feet above the mouth of a well which comprises an oil fire, and the vacuum created by the explosion cut off that flow of gas for a split second—and the fire was out.

To all but the practical oilmen, it seemed a fortunate but minor incident. Now, despite the myriad noises of the crowded valley, there seemed to be utter silence. Four sumps were burning. The Mick and Red Joe were facing each other in light as bright as midday—a light as balefully red as the implications inherent in the men and their leaders, facing each other carefully.



TO THE few men in the world who knew anything at all about the Mick, his eyes were even more the key to what he was thinking than is usual among men. They had not now, as when he had been facing the Apache Kid and Beef Blakely, that glass-like clarity. They were a light blue, wide-open and staring a little. But they were not looking at Red Joe's face. They were staring at his hands. "Just me and you, Joe," the Mick said quietly. "Take it easy—"

He stopped talking as he felt, rather than saw, the muscles of the Indian's face move into an expression of increased tension. Red Joe's face was wet with sweat now and his hands moved up and down the seams of his trousers. Suddenly there were tiny drops of perspiration on the Mick's forehead and upper lip, and his fingers stopped moving.

He knew that all the resentment in Red Joe had come to focus in the body and person of the Mick, and he waited for the inevitable.

It came without the warning of a word or a movement—and as it came, it was as though five hundred men had held their breath for a long time, and then exhaled.

Only Red Joe's right hand moved. There was the crack of a pistol, followed almost instantly by another. The Mick's bullet, hitting Red Joe's gun at the trigger guard, knocked it out of the Indian's hand just as he had it raised to within a foot of the position which would have killed the Mick. A little wisp of

smoke came from the muzzle of the gun in the Mick's right hand. The one in his left hand was trained squarely at Red Joe's heart, and was as motionless as though propped in a gun mount.

Red Joe looked down stupidly at the bleeding stump of his right forefinger, cut off neatly just above the second joint.

"Didn't intend to hit your finger, Joe," the Mick said.

The half-breed looked from his finger to the battered-looking little gunman, twenty feet away. Behind Red Joe, a murmur went through the ranks of the Indians like a breeze whispering through a stand of drought-dried corn.

Streaming up from the foot of the slope, skirting the inferno of heat which was made by the burning sumps, came Coda and a tight little band of oilmen, followed by a nondescript mob composed of every kind of person from dancehall girl to retired octogenarian farmer. But no one in the two armies toward the crest of the slope appeared to be aware of the existence of Coda and his followers.

"I could have killed you, Joe," the Mick said without emotion, and every man there knew that it was so.

The Indian stared unbelievably at the Mick, various emotions striving for precedence in his face.

"I didn't," the Mick went on, "because you're half right and we're all right. We want your help in doing business."

"What kind of business?" the Indian sneered. He was neither cowed nor beaten. The tiniest fraction of a second had been all that had separated him from the Mick—and it was no disgrace to be a lot farther behind the Mick than that.

"The business of getting oil out of all the land around here—fast and fair," the Mick said. "Listen—"

In a few sentences, gesturing at the big company men and Coffin, he described how, if they cooperated against Coda, any oil there would start flowing from the Indian lands within a matter of a few months. Then Red Joe was interpreting to his followers and while Coda, alone and unarmed, rode up the slope, the breed was saying to the Mick, "We get one-eighth royalty. O. K. The refinery gets oil, the big companies get oil, everybody gets something. Where do you get yours?"

"Not out of you. Out of the big companies. Commission for swinging the deal."

Red Joe sucked his bleeding stump of a finger.

"There must be some trick to it," he said. "But we'll play along until we find out different."

"There won't be any different."

"Here comes Coda now," Red Joe said.



The Mick's bullet, hitting Red Joe's gun at the trigger guard, knocked it out of the Indian's hand just as he had it raised to within a foot of the position which would have killed the Mick.



THE Mick turned his horse until it was ranged alongside Red Joe's. Coffin and the three company men drifted forward and formed a loose ring around the two gunmen. Coda's long, narrow eyes were lines of shiny, opaque black. A thin smile was as cold as the dead white of his teeth. He spoke to the Mick.

"I should have made it eight-one instead of twelve-one," he said.

"I was out of town before eight," the Mick said. "Coda, we saved your wells here. Now we're saving the whole pool."

"From what?"

"From you. We want all that eastern acreage back—a sixteenth royalty to you for proving it up with that well over there."

"No."

As though Coda had not spoken, the Mick went on, "Same on those Indian leases—with a

thirty-second royalty to you as a bonus on your original leases."

"No."

"The big companies have teamed up," the Mick pursued calmly, "and will start developing the whole field fast. We want the papers signed tonight."

"No."

"Play out your act if you want," the Mick said. "But the fire tonight saved your dive-keeping friends from being run out of town. Saved you from being kidnaped. Coda, you do the square thing, or as sure as the Lord made little apples, you won't live till sunup!"

Coda's icy contempt was half real, half an act, and all good.

"I suppose any man would murder if there was money enough in it," he said.

"Let it go at that," the Mick said. "You've been the kingpin around here, holding back the development of your kingdom, and now there's a revolution."

"The leases are mine, the pool is mine, and I play it my own way," Coda said. "You and your rubes and your big companies be damned! Donn Coda plays it his way—and alone."

"It's a nice layout," the Mick continued, as though he had never stopped. "The combine, with half the money in the whole world, seems like, behind them, take over the whole pool. They pay you a fair price for your wells and a royalty besides. You're chief executive—production manager, the whole works—at a good salary besides your royalty interests. I'm your assistant, learning the business from the ground up. Red Joe's a good man when he stays sober and keeps his temper."



His horse moved a few paces forward, without any visible or audible command, toward the aloof Coda.

"You want power, and we're all kind of pioneers and love the oil business as well as the money that's in it. There's lots of places in this world a lot of hombres wouldn't want to go into after oil. With Joe's guns, your brains and my winnin' personality, after we finish up here we might go quite a ways, Coda."

"Your sentiments touch me to the heart," Coda said. "The answer is no."

"There's a lot of oil around here," the Mick said. "All yours. Where you planning to sell it?"

Coda's wide, thin mouth opened but no words emerged. He looked past the Mick to Lowell Coffin and the three impassive oil executives. Then he looked from side to side, where Squibb and Slade and Gibbs had taken their stations. Coda looked back of him, and for a moment was startled to see a thousand people standing on the slope, silently watching the conference which they could not hear but which they sensed had their own futures in its hands. From the organized army of white men to the stoical Indians, his gaze traveled, and finally came back to rest on the Mick.

"You think of everything, don't you?" he said, voice and eyes level.

Lowell Coffin polished his pince-nez as he tuned to Coda.

"We do not feel justified in completing the refinery while you remain in charge of the field's development," he said, "because that development will be too slow."

"So you can sit around, if you stay alive, and rot along with your own oil," the Mick said.

"What do you get out of it?" Coda wanted to know.

"Royalty from the big companies and the refinery," the Mick said. "I got no use for a man that isn't scairt once in a while, or who doesn't go ahead when he is scairt, but there's a dividing line between having guts and just

being a plain damned fool. Ready to talk business?"

Suddenly the glimmer in the lone wolf's hard black eyes turned into just the suspicion of a twinkle.

"And I've got no use for any man that hasn't got a little larceny in his heart," he said. "So let's get drunk tonight and do business tomorrow."

"Let's do business tonight and get drunk tomorrow," the Mick corrected him. "In just a minute, we're telling the world—those Indians out there, and those white people down there. In a general way and along the lines mentioned, details to be ironed out pronto, it's a deal on the Indian leases and on the eastern stuff, too?"

"It's a deal."

And as the Indians seized the excuse for a wild-riding celebration, and the crowd on the slope went wild, and Sewell itself seemed to learn the news by mental telepathy—the Mick found himself loping townward between Bill Squibb and Coda. The sumps were burning merrily, watched by an army of men who were putting out small brush fires in the vicinity of the fires. A trained crew was plugging the wild well pending its repair, and the crews of drilling wells were going back with a reluctance as obvious as the whiskey bottles with which they were dulling their disappointment at not being in Sewell on this great occasion.

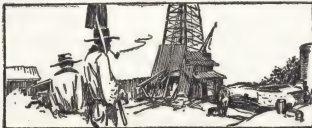
"You know," the Mick said, jingling the coins in his pocket, "it's sure cheap to live in Sewell."

"You haven't been here very long," Coda pointed out.

"A little over thirty hours by the clock," the Mick smiled. "Come in town with two dollars and still got it, and made myself a little money besides. Can't beat that."

"I said I liked a man with a little larceny in his heart," Coda said. "In you, it's grand larceny."

"Which is what you need in the oil business," Bill Squibb said, "in a legal kind of a way."



ONE MORE FIGHT

ILLUSTRATED BY
JULIAN G.
CHAMBERS

"When I hit the top, I'll look you up," Frankie said.



By
JOE ARCHIBALD

HARRY LOGAN got off the big Greyhound in Bentonville and followed three other travel-weary passengers into the small terminal. He dropped his old suitcase to the floor in front of a grilled window and asked about the south-bound bus to a place called Mayfield.

The man on duty looked it up as if the effort pained him very much, and finally he said, "None out of here until seven-thirty in



the morning." Logan heaved a deep sigh and went over to the lunch counter where he lifted his corpulence onto a stool and ordered apple pie and black coffee. The coffee warmed him and stripped some of the weariness of an all-day ride away from his bones. He ate his pie slowly, waited until the pressure of the moment was off the lumpy blonde back of the counter before he inquired about a hotel.

"There's one here," the woman said. "It's the Kearsarge House, if you ain't too particular, and they ain't filled up." She punched a check and tossed it toward him. "You picked a bad night to stop over in this burg. When there's fights on—"

"Fights?" Harry Logan's eyes became a little brighter. "T'night, they got fights?"

"Yeah. They come from all over to see the fights here," the waitress said. "If I was you, I wouldn't waste time gettin' to the hotel."

"Thanks," Logan said, and was suddenly aware of the blowsy blonde's close scrutiny. Time was when it bothered him to have people stare at his face with its lumpy eyebrows and flattened nose and myriad little crescent and V-shaped scars, but like his old man used to say, a guy could even get used to hanging if he was strung up long enough. He felt like telling the blonde that she looked as if she had also stayed too long in her racket, but he controlled the impulse and quickly paid his check. He snatched up his suitcase, hurried out of the terminal and crossed the street, his breath a filmy veil floating around his head. Snow was beginning to fall.

He asked a man how to get to the hotel, and a few minutes later he spotted the electric sign with one of its letters missing. The hotel was a dingy, square brick building. He went inside and up a flight of stairs to a lobby filled with smells that reminded him of the not so long ago. The few chairs were filled and Harry Logan suddenly felt an emptiness where he had put the apple pie.

There was a lot of luck coming to him somewhere, he thought, as he went up to the desk. It might as well be here. And it was. There was a room left and the clerk took his two dollars and handed him a key. "Third floor, to the left. All the way to the end of the hall," the man said, and went back to his dog-eared magazine.

It wasn't much of a room, but it had a small iron bed and a radiator that hissed a warm welcome of its own. The fact that the one window looked out to a bare brick wall was not at all important to Harry Logan, this vista simply being a little less beautiful than all the others he could remember. He sat down on the bed and thought of the few dollars left in his pocket, and he knew it would be crazy to spend another cent for anything save the bare necessities of life. Maybe the guy he had

known years ago in Mayfield was dead or had sold his mill and left town. This was another long chance he was taking. Once more he was nearly out on his feet and throwing a wild right in the hopes that somehow it might connect.

The walls in the hotel were thin. A couple of guys in the next room were talking about the fights. Harry Logan tried very hard not to listen and he lay down on the bed hoping he would fall into a deep sleep and wake up early in the morning with no more of his money spent. He closed his eyes but sleep would not come. His body wanted it but his mind would have none of it and it became surprisingly alive with scraps of memory that had always eluded him.



THE noise of traffic outside steadily built up and Harry Logan guessed all cities and towns sounded the same on fight night. He suddenly remembered a few of them he had good cause to remember, and faces he had long since forgotten began to take shape, and one of them had been his own. It was a twenty year old face with a nice straight nose and clear brown eyes, lacking even the slightest resemblance to the one belonging to the immediate Harry Logan.

Young Harry had been a smart kid. More than once he had said he would quit if he found himself going nowhere. One night, after he had taken more lumps than usual from a strong colored boy, he told his manager, Artie Wilcox, "A couple more like that one, and I am through. A champ or nothin', Artie. I have no ambition to be a crowd pleaser and I have seen many meatballs walking on their heels."

"Smart boy," Artie said. "If you mean it."

Old Harry sat up quickly, and got a good look at himself in a cracked mirror, and he knew it was possible for a man to get punched out of shape until he looked different and thought different and could only prove who he was, if anyone out of the past was interested, by his fingerprints. He thought of the face he had once had and the vows he had made, and then he really did not care about anything. He was going out to buy a ticket for the fights.

Down in the lobby he bought himself a cheap cigar and hung around long enough to read the fight card that was tacked on the wall. There were pictures of the two boys booked for the main bout and they looked young and as ready as they would ever be. JOEY BARSO vs. ALLIE STOLT. The names meant nothing to Harry Logan. A flashily dressed man came up to him and said, "Who you like, old-timer? Maybe we could make a friendly bet—"

Logan moved away. "I don't want to bet," he said, and went out and down the stairs.

He paid three dollars and thirty cents at the Bentonville Armory and went upstairs to the so-called mezzanine and settled into a seat from which he got a nice view of the ring under the arc lights. A four rounder was just getting under way, and although Harry Logan's eyes were not what they should have been, he quickly appraised both boys and guessed the one in the black trunks would win. The boy pranced around and pulled at the ropes and called to customers at the ringside. Harry Logan used to do all that stuff. It was nice to remember.

The sandy-haired kid in the purple pants looked plenty eager and cocky himself. He fidgeted on his stool and banged his gloves together. In the center of the ring, just after the bell, he caught Black Trunks with a hard right and proceeded to club his man to the ropes where he lowered his head and aimed his guns lower. The sympathetic nerves in Harry Logan's meridian twitched, and he lived over the night he had come alive in a dressing room and had let go everything that was in his stomach. That was another night he had told Artie Wilcox he was through.

The crowd was yelling for Purple Pants to make his kill, but Black Trunks managed to squirm out of the pocket and away from the ropes and tie the sandy-haired kid up. The referee was on the job and he broke the fighters and told them to get in there and fight again. Harry Logan did not know he was rolling around in his seat and throwing short punches until the man next to him lost his patience and caused him much embarrassment by the things he said. A man in front turned around and looked at Harry. At first he glared, but soon grinned. "An old meatball, huh? By the looks of you, my friend, you have no advice those boys should use."

"I'm sorry," Harry Logan said in his low husky voice. "I'm sorry." He settled lower into his seat, trying to make his one hundred and eighty odd pounds as inconspicuous as possible, and looked toward the ring again. There was a quick blast of sound and the kid in the black trunks went down near his own corner, flat on his face.

The sandy-haired fighter skipped away and the third man counted out the string. Purple Trunks danced a little jig, hugged a little bald-headed man who threw a robe around him. Two other fighters were climbing into the ring.

Harry Logan felt a hard cold lump under his breastbone as he watched the boy in the black trunks walk drunkenly along the aisle toward the darkness beyond the reach of the lights.

The bell kept up its clamor, and soon there was enough quiet to enable the announcer to make himself understood.

"The next contest! Eight rounds. From Latimer Falls, Ohio—Frankie Riehl!"



A LIGHT flashed suddenly in a remote corner of Harry Logan's mind and he bent as far forward as he could and stared down at the chunky fighter who was dropping lackadaisically onto his stool. His eyes were failing him fast; he wondered if his shapeless ears were beginning to trick him, too. The man they had called Frankie Riehl moved around down there mechanically, strictly from routine. He had been around a long time. No exhibitionism, no horsing around.

Frankie Riehl, Latimer Falls. And suddenly Harry Logan closed his eyes and nodded his head. The last man he had fought, over eleven years ago. Frankie had been twenty-five then, with only a couple of small scars on his face, and he had been looking toward the middleweight title. Harry Logan, that night, was thirty-four. He had felt twice as old after Frankie had knocked him out in the fourth.

The man going against Frankie looked young and very strong, and Harry Logan, a sickness in him, wondered if the pattern would ever change. Always one more fight. That one more pyramiding into a hundred painful brawls until only the heart was willing and mind and flesh could stand no more. He did not think he could watch for more than a round or two. When the action started, he really did not see it at all because he and Frankie were not in Bentonville at the moment, but back in a drafty, stinking dressing room in a city many miles away. . .

Frankie Riehl came in to shake his hand and tell him it was too bad two guys could not win the same fight.

"Thanks," Harry Logan said, working his tongue around to a bad cut inside his mouth. "My last one, Frankie, an' this time I got to mean it. Because when the time comes a guy takes punches like you throw and feels no pain, it is just about too late. Sit down, Kid, as I got to talk to you."

Frankie said, grinning, "I know, Harry. Don't follow in your footsteps because I'll end up on round heels and talking like there was iron filings in my throat."

"It is not that funny, Frankie. Once I had as much as you, maybe a little more. You've got maybe two more years to find out how far you can go in this business. Of all the fighters in the world, how many become champs? Frankie, please quit when you still got time."

"I'll think it over, Harry. T'night, I draw down four hundred fish, an' where else could I make that kind of dough in a single night in a few minutes? Well, good luck to you, Harry."

"Before you go," Harry Logan said, "take a good last long look at me, Frankie. There's a lot of stumblebums look just like me. Once our faces were all different—don't forget that."

(Continued on page 143)

A HORSE FOR THE COLONEL



ILLUSTRATED
BY
V. E. PYLES

THE boy sat the two-year-old without effort, rising, falling, rising in a single flow of rhythmic movement as the horse jogged down the trail behind the caravan. His knees gripped the reddish flanks, restraining the sorrel's sure-footed power. The rumps of the horses ahead heaved up and down in a bobbing pattern of black and brown and their shoes clattered on rock. Fiercely Rongo clutched a tuft of mane. For this moment, at least, the Red One was his.

Like a ribbon of destiny the trail wound dizzily to the distant canyon floor. Every step brought them nearer. The inevitability of what waited there fell numbing on his mind until he could no longer think. Today the long ride would end. Tomorrow the trail would be empty and he must walk alone.

"Hurry, boy!" Mawshi's angry shout rang from the head of the column. The old man let the other herders pass and shook his rifle. "Close up! Close up!"

Rongo gave the reins a reluctant shake. The sorrel lengthened stride, urging the others, and the train broke into a rocking stiff-gaited trot. It was like the old man, Rongo brooded, to think first of his purse. Mawshi the Trader would do an abbot out of his prayer wheel, they said in the Grasslands. In the canyon

The Lolo leaped forward and Rongo felt the graze of steel along one thigh as the sorrel reared to his hind legs.



By HAL G. EVARTS



below lay the camp of the rich white Meigwa soldiers who were anxious to buy. Word of their craze for pack animals had traveled over the passes into the High Country, tempting even Mawshi; nothing less than silver would have lured him into Lolo Land.

Rongo glanced over his shoulder at the leaden sky and the mountains, lifting bleak and immense into mist-shrouded peaks—a hostile country unfit for honest men and horses. The Chinese patrols were off to war so that now raiding tribesmen ranged the frontier. A Lolo would certainly beat the Red One, whereas the Meigwas might be kind. That was as much as he dared hope.

A sudden flick of motion on the hillside caught his attention. He swung in the saddle to study the jumble of boulders and talis that spilled down to a meadow cupped between the canyon walls. Only a few stunt junipers stirred in the wind. Undecided, he reined up. The sorrel tensed, his ears laid back, as he shared the boy's uneasiness.

They wheeled from the trail and cut across the grass. They splashed through a stream and Rongo picked a path up the slope. For several minutes he criss-crossed back and forth until they came out against a sheer granite cliff. There was no sign of tracks anywhere. Feeling empty and foolish, he spun the two-year-old around and hurried to overtake the caravan.

Mawshi was out of sight as they galloped back across the meadow. The stream, flowing through a wide cut, rushed to meet them. The sorrel slowed to swerve toward the ford but Rongo checked his head and booted him on. Eagerly the two-year-old shot forward. Rongo crouched low over the neck, his eyes squinted against the stinging wind. Gobbets of turf flew up behind and the horse's haunches gathered for the spring.

For an instant they were suspended between sky and water, the boy and the horse immobile in a common exultation, then thudded triumphant on the far bank, inches from the lip. Rongo straightened, his blood still singing, and eased the sorrel into a lope. From the bag at his belt he drew out a handful of *tamba*, moistened it with spit and fashioned a ball for the horse.

Mawshi waited at a bend in the trail where he had been watching unnoticed. His leathery face was stern. "You are a fool, boy," he declared. "A fool."

Rongo lowered his eyes. He was afraid of the old man. For all his remembered twelve years he had worked for and feared him. "Someone was spying from the rocks, I think," he said.

"You think!" Mawshi snorted. "Was that reason to race my horse, to jump him? You might have snapped a leg."

Rongo stroked the sorrel's coat. The horse

was not asweat, was not even winded. The deep chest and wiry short-coupled legs were made for jumping. But he did not say so. "Perhaps he is too young to sell."

"Too young? This one will bring not less than two hundred rupees. If you didn't pull a tendon."

He respected the old man's business acumen. Mawshi knew to a coin's weight a horse's market value and number of tea bricks any given one could pack at a profit. He knew how to bargain, none better. But what he did not know was a horse's worth. "He will bring a better price next season," Rongo mumbled.

"Enough! Enough!" Mawshi's eyes snapped. "I will take the rear hereafter."

Rongo swallowed. Two hundred rupees was more than he had seen in a lifetime; the old man was not to be coaxed out of such a sum. Glumly he pulled abreast of the Gonka.

The big herdsman grinned. He was slow-witted, a gentle mountain of a man who smelled of grease and leather. With him Rongo could share trouble. "Gonka," he said, "do you have two hundred rupees?"

The Gonka chuckled. "Does a yak have wings?"

They rode ahead knee to knee, each silent with his own thoughts. At length the Gonka said with solemnity, "You may have my tinder box and my turquoise ring, Rongo. You are a good boy."

Rongo shook his head. The first drops of rain pattered. The canyon bottom was not far and a thin column of smoke wavered in the air. The horses were restive, chafing to beat the storm. Rongo flung his cape over the sorrel's withers and turned his face blindly down-trail.



THE corral stood head-high against one side of the canyon, a loosely constructed barrier of stones and interwoven brush. Each spring after the winter floods it was rebuilt by wandering traders, and one, with unusual enterprise, had driven down two driftwood posts to form the framework for a gate. Rongo watched while a white soldier removed the cross poles one by one and opened the stockade.

The rain had slackened to a drizzle and the herd jostled in through a silver sheen, their sides sleek and steaming. Rongo slid to the ground. He loosened the cinch and lifted off the saddle, then slipped the bit from the sorrel's mouth. The two-year-old switched inquiringly. Rongo slapped his rump and he pranced inside.

"They are all for sale?" the white leader, an Army captain, was asking Mawshi. He was red-faced and abrupt and he sat a horse as clumsily as he spoke Tibetan. Moreover he

had displayed ignorance of etiquette by failing to exchange gifts.

"No, not all." Mawshi sucked his pipe with deliberation. "There are other buyers."

The captain was troubled. He had journeyed far into doubtful territory for a definite purpose, taken certain risks beyond his authority. He did not intend to return to his station empty-handed.

"But if the price is high—"

To speak of price so soon was the brand of a novice. Mawshi would drive a sharp bargain, Rongo knew. He squeezed through the gate into the enclosure among the horses. They were fat from summer pasturage and their manes were cropped close, unlike the scrawny Yunan ponies. Their backs were free of sores and their shoes fitted snug. The captain would find no better.

The sorrel nuzzled him as Rongo ducked under the two-year-old's head and he began grooming the horse, brushing out the imprint of the saddle pad and belly band with careful strokes. The coat took on a dull luster, like the glow of late sunset or the russet of oak leaves in autumn, heightened by contrast with the blaze of white face.

"Hello, kid," a voice said. Startled, Rongo peered up at the white soldier perched on top of the gate. The soldier returned his stare with

indolent good humor and dropped one eyelid in a wink.

Rongo flushed. He had helped foal the sorrel, weaned him after the mare was killed in a fall, reared him from a wobbly-kneed colt. But now he felt an unaccountable shyness before the *Meigwa*.

"That your pet horse?" the soldier drawled. Rongo did not comprehend the words but he sensed their meaning. Once, when the sorrel was a yearling, he had filled his belly with crazy weed and leaped about like a wild flame, bloated with the poison, then collapsed glassy-eyed and heaving. Mawshi had been for shooting him then, but Rongo had nursed him through, somehow, with hot applications and purgative.

The sorrel was his in a way that no stranger would understand.

"I got a horse that color back home in Texas," the soldier said. His manner was casual, almost lazy, Rongo decided, but his eyes held a shrewd knowing quality. And then as the captain tramped up, accompanied by Mawshi, he dropped to the ground and stood waiting with a quiet watchfulness.

The captain cocked his head in appraisal. "How do they look to you, Sergeant?" he said.

"O. K.," the sergeant said noncommittally.

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"But I don't think much of this river bottom. Too exposed."

A shade of annoyance crossed the captain's face. The sergeant, he knew, referred to the warning from their own S-2 and from friendly villagers en route. The captain was not stupid; he appreciated the temptation of horses and silver, but he had confidence in his own military judgment and a half squad of riflemen. "Sergeant," he said, "suppose you leave that worry to me."

Purposefully he approached the first horse, a black gelding, and held up three fingers. "For this one," he declared, "three hundred rupees."

Rongo blinked. Such a price for an ordinary pack animal was unheard of. His glance darted to the old man. Only a faint flush betrayed Mawshi's emotion but his eyes glittered. Barter was to him like the air of Dzago La—rare and heady but a necessary thing.

"Four hundred."

"Four hundred." The captain nodded to the sergeant, repeating in English, and the sergeant jotted the figure in a notebook. Rongo let out his breath. The transaction was done, without palaver or heat. Mawshi could have demanded, and received, twice four hundred rupees, for surely the Americans were mad.

His excitement gave way to sickening apprehension. They moved on to the next horse, and the next, the captain bidding and the sergeant scribbling in his book. The price mounted to seven hundred, then to a thousand. Each time the captain grunted, accepting Mawshi's counter without demur or inspection. And Rongo felt a growing and helpless contempt for this man to whom horseflesh meant nothing more than figures on a piece of paper. Mawshi, at least, could carry figures in his head.

"It is possible," the captain said at length, "that you have also a riding horse. These others will do to carry Quartermaster supplies, but—"

"They are all broken to saddle," Mawshi told him gruffly.

The captain's smile was tolerant. "I am searching for a really good horse, one young and with spirit, one that can be trained."

The old man shrugged and looked away. The captain's glance, following Mawshi's, came to rest on the sorrel and his eyes brightened. He picked up a hackamore and led the two-year-old into the clear. Clucking with approval, he circled the horse and poked one flank with his riding crop. The sorrel shied. "Lively enough," the captain said.

"This horse," Mawshi said, "is not on the block."

Rongo's heart took a sudden leap. Perhaps Mawshi would be generous after all. Perhaps he had misjudged the old man. One horse—his horse—Mawshi certainly could spare.

"It is intended as a gift for an important personage—my colonel. The colonel desires to take a fine horse home to America," the captain explained. "Does this one jump?"

"Jump? Why should a mountain horse jump?" The old man scowled at Rongo.

"No matter." The captain sighed. "Only, the colonel prefers jumpers." He studied the sorrel a moment and said, "I will pay two thousand for him."

Rongo gulped. Even Mawshi was momentarily stunned. The old man moistened his lips with his tongue and shifted uncertainly.

"Three thousand then! That is my highest bid."

Mawshi's hands trembled as he lowered his pipe. "The horse is yours for five thousand rupees," he said. "Not less."



THE captain hesitated, tapping the crop in the heel of his hand. It was cold in the canyon now; the rumble of the river was a muted roar and shadows deepened high on the eastern wall, but Rongo could see sweat on the captain's forehead. He knew, as Mawshi knew, that the captain would waver because the captain was that kind of man.

"I better look him over, Cap'n," the sergeant broke in. "You know how fussy the Old Man is."

They watched in silence as the sergeant stepped up beside the sorrel and spoke a few soothing words. His hands came alive, moving with an expert and caressing touch across the red coat. Gently his fingers probed, seeking bruises and sore muscles, and as he worked he hummed a little tune unlike any tune Rongo had ever heard before. And a pang of jealousy gripped him, for this *Meigwa* soldier knew and spoke a language that horses everywhere understood.

"Well?" the captain said.

The sergeant looked up, unhurried, and smiled at Rongo. "I want to watch his leg action first."

They followed the sergeant to the corral gate and waited in the gathering dusk while he struggled with the rain-swollen bars. Rongo glanced around to make sure that no one was watching and scooped up a stone and edged toward the two-year-old. He hated them all, but especially he hated the personage of importance, the colonel, who wished to take his horse far away to a strange and unknown place. "Red One," he whispered. "Don't let them, Red One!"

In the level area beyond the enclosure the sergeant trotted the sorrel a few yards and brought him back. Frowning, he bent to examine the animal's hocks. The captain saw it too. "Lame!" He swore. "The horse is lame!"

The sorrel lowered his left rear foot gingerly.

Rongo stared at the ground to avoid Mawshi's eyes. For this loss the old man would blame him, and of the two he feared Mawshi's wrath almost as much as losing the Red One.

But the sergeant straightened and held out a small flat stone for them all to see. "He's not lame, sir. This rock got caught between the prongs of his shoe, that's all." He paused. "I must've picked it up myself just now."

His eyes held Rongo's an instant, wise with sympathy and understanding, and after the others had gone with the horse he said soberly, half-aloud, "I'm sorry, kid. Mighty sorry."



RONGO lay in the *Meigwa* camp staring into the night red-eyed and sleepless. At daybreak they would strike camp and start the long march home. He tossed fretfully, anxious to be gone, for this place had come to depress him like a sickness and he longed for the air and space of the High Country.

An unfamiliar skein of sound drifted in on the breeze—the river, the boom of water, the cry of a bird. An early morning fog hovered over the sand bar; in another hour or so the sky would lighten. He turned to the Gonka who was snoring under a saddle blanket. "Gonka!" he hissed. "Wake up!"

The herdsman groaned.

"Listen, Gonka. The horses!"

"Horses?" The Gonka muttered and rolled over. "The foreigners have guards and rifles. Get some sleep, boy."

Rongo sat up, straining to hear, and a shiver passed over his body. Only the endless pound of the river beat back upon him, yet he felt a disturbing sense of unease that was a kind of half-fright and anguish. He swallowed the lump in his throat. If the Americans were careless of silver probably they were careless in other matters. Slipping into his boots, he walked to the edge of camp. Half a dozen sleeping figures sprawled on the sand and the embers of a fire still smoldered before the captain's tent. He peered into the dark and tried to distinguish the outline of the corral several hundred yards downstream.

He stiffened at the faint bleat of a nicker off to his right, away from the corral. Possibly the sound was a trick of the wind, or perhaps an American horse on patrol, or even his own imagination; he could not tell. But instead of calling the Gonka he stepped off alone.

The river bar sloped upward to the canyon face, a graveled tangle of driftwood snarls, boulders and patches of willow and thorny scrub. He crossed an open stretch, his felt soles noiseless on the rocks, and dropped into a depression to listen again. A pre-dawn silence brooded over the gorge. Now was the time to turn back; if discovered he would appear not only ridiculous, Rongo knew, but suspicious.

as well. One did not prowl about another man's stock without cause.

He crept on a few paces, slower now, choosing his cover, and dipped over a ridge that cut the camp from view. Mist clung to the hollows in shreds like a dank ghostly shawl, chilling him through. Ahead the squat shape of the enclosure loomed up. There was no movement of horses but a formless gray splotch darkened the ground in front of him.

Before he put out his hand Rongo saw that the man was dead. The still-warm body of an American lay face down, his head almost severed from his shoulders by a knife gash. Rongo dropped to the sand and lay motionless. He was not surprised, nor even particularly moved, because all his life he had heard of Lolo stealth; the only surprising fact was that it had not happened sooner. And although he was thoroughly terrified now, he was also cool with an anger that helped steady his determination.

He waited several minutes, his face pressed against the earth, until he was sure he was unobserved, then crawled to a rock pile and carefully lifted his head. Beyond the corral indistinct blurs flitted toward him and two men wearing turbans and baggy jackets emerged from the haze. A twig cracked and by turning slightly he saw a third man poised over the soldier's body not twenty feet behind him.

Rongo knew better than to scream. That would only attract the Lolo and hasten his own sudden death. Nothing less than a shot would carry back to camp over the river's roar, and he had no gun. Neither could he run because the other would intercept him within a few strides. But unless he could warn Mawshi and the soldiers he was trapped.

He saw all this clearly, almost instinctively, without panic, realizing what he must somehow do. The Lolos were cunning. They had followed the caravan into the canyon after dark to find their opportunity. Lacking stomach for a fight, they planned to steal every horse before arousing the camp, and retreat into the mountains beyond pursuit. The murder of a single sentry had been as efficient as it was simple.

On his stomach he squirmed away, inches at a time, pausing every few seconds to listen. He wriggled into a shallow draw and got to his knees to work forward more quickly. Any moment they would open the gate and stampede the entire herd. As he neared the far side of the enclosure he could hear nervous pawing and he stood up and peered over the top. The horses were milling in a bunch near the gate where the two men strained to lift the top cross bar; and he understood then the reason for the delay: the water-soaked pole tips had swollen tight, wedging in their niches in the uprights.



RONGO took his luck for granted; first his timing, and now this, but it could not last much longer. The third man had joined the others with a length of pole and together they were prying up against the cross bar. After the joints gave would be too late. Feeling for a handhold, he pulled himself up very slowly without dislodging any pebbles and balanced along the corral top, then dropped softly to the floor inside.

It did not occur to him that the sorrel was no longer his responsibility, nor that the owner, a colonel, was a man he would never see. This had become a personal affair. He did not even have a definite plan; he merely kept moving forward with an inherent and dogged caution, measuring each footfall and the distance to the horses. The Americans, or someone, would surely come soon, but not soon enough.

The men worked with their backs to him, silhouetted in the murk of approaching dawn and careless in their hurry. Rongo heard their panting and the crunch of splintering wood. He ran on his toes along the shelter of the fence and veered into the open toward the sorrel.

The two-year-old tossed his head, testing the wind, and trotted to meet him with a joyous snort.

Rongo froze where he stood. At the unexpected sound the three Lolos dropped their lever and whirled around. They saw him instantly, cornered and naked of cover in the center of the corral. He was paralyzed, unable to move or cry out in any last futile effort, and this rigidity the three men mistook for something else. The leader motioned. The other two snatched up rifles leaning against the wall and circled in opposite directions to begin to close in from both sides.

He retreated a step and edged up beside the sorrel. The Lolo came straight for him, advancing with a lethal grace, his thumbs hooked over a scabbard that swung on his belt. The other pair Rongo disregarded; it was this one who blocked his way. The two-year-old stamped with impatience and butted his shoulder. He twined his fingers in the sorrel's mane as he stood face to face with the Lolo, making his decision, and the blood throbbed in his ears. The man was almost upon him, as silent and sure as the intent in his eyes, when Rongo flung himself suddenly onto the horse's back.

The Lolo leaped forward and he felt the graze of steel along one thigh as the sorrel reared to his hind legs. The forehoofs smashed down and the man screamed. The others had reached the horse and were grasping to yank him off. He drummed his heels against the sorrel's ribs. The two-year-old neighed shrilly and reared again, shaking off both men, and

plunged toward the gate through a pandemonium of scattering horses.

As he opened his eyes the gate bars shot toward him at an angle. The top-most pole was still locked in place, slim and deadly, the height of a tall man. He jockeyed the sorrel to straighten their approach and hung on, unconscious of the crack of rifles at his back as the Lolos made a desperate try to cut him down. In his mind he knew that the jump was impossible, that he had no runway and that the sorrel's muscles were cold, but he had nothing to lose now—nothing at all.

"Now!" he shouted. "Now!"

The hind feet struck with the shattering impact of the takeoff. He felt the wrench of the horse's body, straining to arch upward and out, the convulsive effort of muscle, and then as they gained height, a deceptive sense of ease as though they were floating. The air was fresh on his face and he breathed deep. He braced himself and as the sorrel came down over and beyond the gate he rocked forward with the jar without losing his seat.

He ran the horse on through the brush, not looking back. The sound of rifles had awakened the soldiers at last and they were firing too. Suddenly he felt tired and spent, for there was nothing more he could do. What happened next would not really concern him, whether the Lolos escaped or not. Mawshi and the captain would be displeased, he supposed, and there would be some explaining. Safe behind a thicket, he dismounted and gave the sorrel a pat. On foot Rongo led him toward camp.



IT WAS late morning by the time the captain returned to the campsite from the unpleasant task of supervising a burial detail. During his absence the Tibetan horse traders had departed and some of his own men had readied their equipment for the long trek ahead. All was placid along the river bar and the horses he had bought the preceding afternoon were picketed in line for his final inspection.

He was an orderly man and in his mind he was framing the report he must submit upon his return to headquarters. In formal military prose it would read: "Subject: Skirmish With Hostile Raiders. To: Commanding Officers—the Quartermaster Battalion. Estimated Total Enemy Strength: 3. Enemy Casualties: 3 Dead. Friendly Casualties: 1 EM KIA."

The captain regretted the loss of a member of his command, but this he regarded as in the line of duty. It was unfortunate, but clearly unavoidable.

As he rode up the sergeant known as "Tex" was sitting on a log cleaning his M1. "All set, Sergeant?" he called, and the sergeant merely nodded.

The captain felt on the defensive before this man without knowing quite why and it slightly nettled him.

"Well," he said, "we accomplished our mission. We got what we came after."

The sergeant rammed his rod down the barrel without comment.

"I thought you'd like to know," the captain went on, "that I measured the height of that cross bar on the corral gate. It stands six feet one inch from the ground. When you figure the horse took it at an angle and with less than twenty yards to get started in—say, that's jumping, Sergeant!"

The captain rubbed his hands. He was pleased with his own discernment and glad that events had borne out his estimate of the situation. The colonel would most certainly be grateful.

"That's ridin'," the sergeant said evenly. "That kid sat the red bareback, without a halter, without anything. What he did took guts."

The captain's gaze strayed absently along the line of animals as he looked for the sorrel, his thoughts preoccupied with the future. The sergeant got to his feet and began humming a tune.

It was a tune of his own native place, touched with nostalgia and longing, and he thought of these things remotely as he watched the captain's expression. "A great horse," the captain said. "A natural jumper. The colonel will be delighted."

"Funny about that horse," the sergeant drawled. He closed the butt plate of his rifle with a snap. "He'd follow that kid around like a dog."

The captain looked puzzled. "How do you mean, follow the kid . . . ?"

"While you were gone, Cap'n, I shoosed all the horses back in the corral. Then after the kid and the old man took off seems like this red just wouldn't stay cooped up. He just naturally jumped that fence again and lit off for the hills. Nothing I could do to stop him."

He met the captain's eyes squarely and grinned. "So I reckon we'll have to find the colonel another horse."

At that same moment Mawshi's caravan, now reduced to three riding and two pack animals, toiled along a trail far above the canyon floor, plodding upward across the immensity of the mountains. Rongo rode the sorrel at Mawshi's tail, slouched happily and lulled by the creak of leather and the jingle of harness.

The sun was warm on his back and he sniffed the freshening air which stirred down from the pass.

The old man had said nothing yet and he wondered how to broach the subject. "Mawshi," he began, "that was a splendid gift of the Meigwa sergeant to make you."

"Gift?" Mawshi jerked around in his saddle. "Why, we saved all their stock, and probably their lives. The gift was only decent hospitality."

The old man's mouth softened to a pucker and his eyes twinkled. He said, "You and the horse are young—young and skittish as colts—and often foolish. But you have heart in you both." He waved his arm imperiously. "Go now, and ride in the lead, as befits the owner of a jumping horse."



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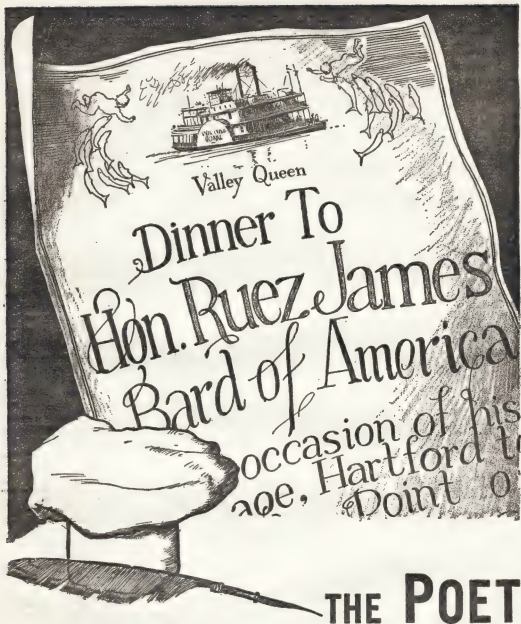
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RAILROAD MAGAZINE

205 E. 42nd St., N. Y. City 17



By
CARL D. LANE

ILLUSTRATED BY
EARL EUGENE MAYAN

SAM DABALL, chief steward of the river paddler *Valley Queen*, sniffed expertly of the savory odors which swirled through the steam of his snow-white galley. His brick ovens sizzled. On his cooking tops a dozen copper kettles sang songs of promise and chilly drops of condensation wept to the deck from the great ice chest.

The steamer was moored to the Hartford wharf, her freight already on board, creaking



Sam licked his pencil wet for a last go at his poem.

AND THE GALLEY SLAVE

gently against the piles. From the deck above, Sam could hear the whoosh of hazel brooms putting on the last holiday touches. The safeties blubbered with waiting steam and from the hurricane deck staffs twenty-two flags, one for each state of the Union, whipped in the up-river breeze. Sam whistled happily and threw open the galley port.

He guessed that a thousand folks had gathered on the wharf for a glimpse of Ruez James.

Danger Disbro, who was the pilot and the father of Sam's girl, had rigged hold-back lines from the carpeted gangplank to the yard of the Drovers and Rivermen where the great poet's coach would arrive. It was an honor to carry a passenger as famous as Mr. James and Sam keenly felt his responsibility in the great day's program. It was his job to prepare the dinner of welcome.

"Sing-a-little!" Sam yelled to his black sec-

and steward. "I haven't caught the smell of cross-mary yet. You sure you put some into this reed bird stuffing?"

"Power o' paddles!" Sing-a-little admitted, going to the herb case. "Ah complete remembered, de poet day got me so excited."

"Today you better remember everything," Sam said. "Mr. Tooker's spending a cool hundred dollars extra on this dinner and it's got to pay him."

Mr. Tooker was the owner of the Valley Queen. Carrying famous passengers and feeding 'em expensive dinners, bidding for their praise, was good business, a thing Mr. Tooker hadn't enjoyed since the Fast Line had come to threaten his trade on the river. He calculated, telling Sam so when he had ordered the dinner, that if the occasion went off well folks would travel the Valley Queen for months just to eat in the same saloon and tromp the same decks as America's greatest poet.

"Ruez James is a gourmet," Mr. Tooker had pointed out, smoothing his beaver over one of Sam's steaming kettles. "He dotes on vittles, I'm told. Mr. Daball, you please him and there'll be an appreciation, I promise. I'd say a man who writes poetry for his girl might be needing some extra pay soon, eh?"

Sam didn't reply, not wanting to admit to the poem he was writing for the great occasion. In a way, the poem was to be a surprise for Amy Disbro and Sam had come to think of it, in a secret sort of way, as a cure-all for his troubles with Amy. If the poem were to succeed—well, he guessed some extra pay might speed up his marrying plans.

"Sing-a-little," Sam said, "don't bother me for a while; I'm going to the pantry and touch up my poem for the last time."

"Mis' Sam," Sing-a-little chirped with interest, "how many times you do dat poem dere in de pantry?"

"Eleven times," said Sam with pride, "which is nuthin'. Good poets like Mr. James do 'em twenty-three times before they're done right."

"How 'bout Le Grande Avery?" Sing-a-little asked in his sing-song voice. "How many times dat feller do 'em?"

"I don't know," Sam growled. "I don't know anything about his poem except it better be all-fired good to beat mine today."



SAM shut the pantry door and licked his pencil wet for a last go at his poem. But his mind and his eyes kept stealing to the menu card tacked on the white bulkhead beside the peek-hole to the saloon. It was an elegant piece of printing, in 12-point Steamboat surrounded by a frame of cherubs riding on sporting dolphins in three colors. Sam guessed it had cost Mr. Tooker a good part of the extra money he was risking on this trip. It read:

Dinner to

Hon. Ruez James, Bard of America

On the occasion of his passage, Hartford to Saybrook Point, on the Str. Valley Queen, Sept. 23, 18—In the Lower Main Saloon At Meridian (exact)

Programme de Jour.

Fanfare . . . Governor's Footguards

Poem of Welcome . . . Miss Beaumelle

Lacey (Poem by Miss Lacey)

Ode to a Wayfaring Bard . . . by Mr. Samuel Daball (between the relevés and ornamental dishes)

The Fair Connecticut . . . by Mr. Le Grande Avery (Verses between subsequent courses)

Menu.

Turtle Broth with Wild Rice, à la East Haddam

Crème Perigieux, à la Tooker—

Sam skipped the reading of the eighty-four dishes of his great dinner. He knew each by heart; he could smell their tantalizing odors even now. Sam was a good steward, famous on ten New England rivers and taught by the great Jacob Downer of the DeWitt Clinton himself. Sam wasn't worried about his dinner.

But his poem, mentioned right out so in display type, did worry him. He still wondered how he had had the temerity to permit it to be read to the famous Ruez James and to deliberately cross swords, so to speak, with Le Grand Avery. Le Grande had been called the state's most promising young bard and his poems had appeared in papers as far away as Boston and New Haven.

But Miss Lacey, the president of the Ladies' Reading and Cultural Society, had encouraged him. She had even helped him with the spelling and such. Sam's Ode was a brave rollicking piece. Its meter beat like the thump of the paddles against the ebb. There wasn't a sad line in it, proving that poetry didn't have to be melancholy, and in places you had to mispronounce words to make them rhyme just like in all first-rate poetry.

Amy had been almighty peculiar and womanish about wanting him to shine, to excel beyond his fame as a steward. Lately, when Sam had gone courting her, wanting the kisses that had always been his, he knew that he was competing with the culture and talents of Le Grande Avery.

"When Le Grande visits," Amy had told him once, dreamily, turning her cool cheek to his lips, "he reads his poetry to me. It's beautiful, Sam . . . and Le Grande says poetry is a window to the soul. When we were in school Sam, you used to write me poetry."

Sam hadn't paid much attention, being too busy being a good steward. But lately Le Grande Avery had become more than a threat.

Last Sunday evening Sam had called on Amy with a confection cake that he'd spent the whole afternoon layover making. It was as pretty as any verse a man could compose for a girl. But Amy had gone carriage riding with Le Grande and Sam and Danger ate the cake themselves, washing it down with some aged cider that made Sam forget his troubles for a few hours.

"He's a earth's fragile child—and a danged spindly one," Danger, who hated anything but an out and out he-man, growled. "Sam, I hope Mr. James praises your poem to high heaven. That'll fetch you my girl again. But after that, fer cat's sake, forget poetry and make your marryin' plans. I mistrust poets for son-in-laws, Sam."



SAM made his last corrections, refining and re-flavoring, somewhat as he'd gone over his dinner menu, getting the correct balance and rhythm. When it was finished he took it to Miss Lacey, who fluttered over the final details of the reception. "Kind of read it, Ma'am," said Sam and blushed, "toward Miss Disbro, please."

Miss Lacey, lumbering and kindly, but as efficient as a main engine boiler, took time off from her large affairs for Sam. "Sam, you love Amy Disbro very much, don't you?" she asked.

"Yes'm," Sam admitted, "and she used to love me. Trouble is, a steward ain't great shakes compared to a preacher or a poet or such. I reckon Amy wants me to have culture—only she ain't quite certain whether it's the doin' or bein' kind."

"Don't you worry, Sam," Miss Lacey advised. "Your poem is nothing to be ashamed of and I'll read it my best."

"Mis' Sam," Sing-a-little interrupted, "de beans need you."

Sam did his beans in sweet cream, with a touch of molasses to enhance their rich earthy flavor. A dozen dishes needed his expert touch. "Now de lobster," said Sing-a-little, "you want 'em in a border o' jelly or wif quinnelles o' salmon, huh?"

"Neither," said Sam. He rummaged his mind, searching for just the right combination, like Ruez James might search for just the right set of words for one of his deathless poems. "Sing-a-little," cried Sam with inspiration, "pick the lobster and drown it in oyster sauce with chopped spring mint in it and touch it off with melted sweet butter when you serve. If anybody inquires, it's Sauce James, invented especially for this dinner."

"Yassuh!" Sing-a-little crooned, licking his lips. "Mis' Sam, you is famouser eve'y dinnah you do, suh!"

"I only want to be famous to one person," Sam said. "Fetch the watermelons from the ice and swamp 'em with Mr. Tooker's best Jamaica rum."

"Ol' Tooker," Sing-a-little croaked, "won't lak dat nohow."

"He'll have to," Sam said. "There's nuthin' more important this day than for both of us to please Mr. James. Get the rum."

His dinner was perfect. Sam hoped his poem was as good. Mr. James, as everybody knew, was a plain homey man, not given to praising where it wasn't due. His own poetry was simple and strong and sincere. He shunned Greek gods and strange meter and wrote of everyday things which common mortals could relish and understand: smoky hill ranges and frost-nipped alders, the song of the watermill, the cooking odors of a country hearth and such. Sam, in a way, had put together a poem of food and Mr. James ought to be pleased. A man appreciative of good food and with enough of it in him, might be right generous in his praise of another's poetry.

Thinking about that food, the juices began to run in Sam's mouth and he counted that a good sign. The backbone of Sam's dinner was the abundant harvest of the river valley; turtle and lobster and trout and turkey and game and hog and full-eared late corn, the squashes and beans and pumpkins and fruits, and ginger cake and pies and preserves and good Connecticut valley wine. Jacob Downer, in the galley of heaven, must be licking his lips this minute.

"Mis' Sam," yelled Moddy the baker, "de pigeon cutlet pies am done. Come an' give 'em yo' blessin', suh!"



THE Windsor coach swept in, right on time and with horses alather. Sam was a prisoner at his stove and couldn't watch. The *Valley Queen* trembled with rolling steam, ready to hook up for the long down-river run. Major Strong's regimental band struck up *The Poet's March*. Excited feet tramped on the deck above, the mooring lines whipped aboard and the stack whistles blared three times in vast pride.

Sam heard the ready bell on the starboard paddle box ring once and the engineer jump to his throttle. Presently the paddles commenced their slow ponderous starting roll and the farms of Harford glided past Sam's window like visions in the cooking steam. Danger Disbro's whalebone walking stick rapped three times on the deck, calling for full speed, and with the curious thrust and quiver of a paddler making knots, the *Valley Queen* swept down the silvery path through the forest to salt.

Sing-a-little laid the table, calling Sam from the diadem of sweetbreads to arrange the

flowers, the talent of arrangement not being given to ordinary mortals. It was exactly noon, with the paddler legging it off Higganum Landing, when Sam dried his face and, putting on his stock and broadcloth, took his post at the pantry peek-hole.

The dining room gleamed in varnished and brocaded splendor, stabbed by the somber fire of silver and satin-white napery. The crystal, quivering with the paddle beat, was polished to the twinkling of winter stars, and over the table Moddy's oldest pickaninny gently waved the flychaser. Danger Disbro's cane signal-rapped twice on the deck. The throttle clanged and the engine vibration which could spill wine or shatter ornamental dishes, faded to a low pleasant tremble. The fanfare rang out—and into the elegance of it all walked the great poet and the celebrities invited to the dinner.

Even with the savory odors of the dinner, delicious and tempting about him, Sam forgot everything but the sight of Ruez James. His poem and Le Grande Avery's and Mr. Tooker's fight for the river trade and all that these things meant to him fell suddenly away.

Ruez James stood a head above his neighbors, his gray flowing beard spreading on his deep chest like the cape feathers of an eagle. His arms swung with the easy grace of a reaper's and his hands were rough and gnarled by the chore-labor of his farm from which he drew the simplicity and sense of his mighty verse. He walked proudly yet humbly, his mild brown eyes kindly in their lairs above the bearded cheeks. He gave Sam the feeling that he stood upon a foundation of granite, as solid and trustful as that which supported the crags of the distant Holyoke range, and Sam knew that if his poem was mentioned at all it would be judged fairly and fearlessly.

"Mr. Daball," Mr. Tooker whispered, "are you a poet or a steward? Mr. Daball, let the dinner commence."

Sam tore his eyes from the poet, letting them linger for a moment on Amy as her waiter seated her. She sat between Miss Lacey and Le Grande Avery and Sam wished she'd look his way. But come the *relevés*, Sam reckoned, she would. Perhaps she would smile at him in the way she had as she'd mixed with his dreams as he wrote the Ode.

He crooked his finger, sending in the first course. Seven soups it was, but Sam was proudest of the turtle broth. It was clear as branch water and delicately spiced, just right to whet the appetite for what was to come. As the black men moved silently behind the chairs, Miss Lacey arose, to recite her welcome poem in measured voice.

*Welcome, O welcome, great bard of our land,
In fellowship true, we extend our hand—*

Sam scarcely heard it. His attention was on the poet who smacked lips like any hungry farmhand and spooned away to the bare china. Sam knew he'd hit him right with the turtle soup. Mr. James bowed politely at the close of the poem but said nothing. *A smart one*, Sam thought, *he'll say nothing 'til he can say good*.

Sam was terribly proud of his fish course, and took pains to serve it at exactly the right stage of its cooking. Overcooking, when food lost flavor and retained only taste, was downright sinful to Sam; as sinful as a poor rhyme or a mis-accented iambus might be to Ruez James.

When he nodded to the waiters, they marched in with the steaming platters. Each dish was an artistic creation, the last parsley sprig was laid just right and the juices still murmured gently.

Sam served them hickory-broiled trout from the swift waters of the Cobalt Rill and sheepshead, fingerling in wine sauce from its placid pools. There was shad too, and bluefish, from tide water, each served whole and with a crisp fall rose in its jaws. Mr. James ate with obvious relish. But he didn't touch the sheepshead and Sam knew a moment of panic.

"Mis' James," Sing-a-little whispered, "say de food transpo't him to de realms o' de angels. 'Cept de sheepshead. He ain't a Vermonter an' he can't abide it."

"He shows sense," said Sam, relieved. "Serve the *relevés*."

Sam's poem followed the *relevés*. He'd been waiting for this course half his life, seemed if. The waiters filed by with the meat-smelling platters; young capon, a saddle of mutton with beach plum preserve and a fillet roast beef, dripping with mushroom sauce. All these things Sam checked with the eyes and nose of a master, counting the seconds.

"De poet," Sing-a-little reported, "remark to Miss Amy he admire de food superior to de poetry. Mis' Sam, yo' poem better make him unsay dat."

Sam sure hoped it would. He stole a look at Amy. He wanted her to be surprised—and proud; proud as she used to be and enough to love him alone forever. Sing-a-little's men cleared the table noiselessly. Ruez James sighed happily and publicly unhitched his gal-luses a caution. Miss Lacey rose buxomly. "Next," she announced, "I will read 'Ode to a Wayfaring Bard' composed for the occasion by Mr. Sam Daball."



SAM's head was in a sudden whirl. He traded a heart-pounding quick-glance with Amy, thrilling to what he saw in her blue eyes; trying to hide the pride she was feeling. Miss Lacey burst into Sam's opening lines with spirit.

*The day has come! Yon hawser's cut!
For a bard sails down the Connecticut.
Loud blow the whistle; aloft with the flags
Our pilot is good and knows all the smags.*

"Mis' Sam," said Sing-a-little with respect, laying aside a pilfered capon joint, "anybody'd druther eat than hyar dat mus' be crazier'n a Hessian fool-chile. Mis' Amy's a wastin' time scandalous wif dat Mis' Avery, suh."

Now it would be nice to relate that the reading so proceeded and was finished and that the great poet commended Sam's talent to Miss Amy's awakening and the fulfillment of Sam's crying dreams. But to record it so would be spaced considerable from the Gospel. Ruez James was a plain man, accustomed to speak the truth as plain men do. And Miss Lacey was an impatient soul, minded to fish without heed of what she hooked.

Sam's Ode finished nicely and in good rhyme. Amy smiled at him like she used to and she seemed to move away from Le Grande Avery and closer to him. But Miss Lacey remained standing, beaming on the poet. "Mr. James," she asked brightly, "what do you think of our valley poets so far?"

The great man smiled grimly, like a man facing a chore not to his liking but needed doing. "Ma'am," Ruez James said slowly, picking his words, "ma'am, may I remark that poetry is not always written or recited. Sometimes it's sung or hammered or hoed or painted or just plain done. I haven't seen much but the written kind on my tour and I'm sort of worried about the future of America's poetry. Yet today, Ma'am, I've enjoyed the best poem I ever ran across—it was cooked. Ma'am, have you tasted of that saddle of mutton?"

The room was silent and still and Sam almost retched with the shame of it. The engines pounded smoothly, rattling no service, and beyond the saloon sash the lush browning shore timber glided by as always just as if nothing had happened. Automatically he signaled out the cold and ornamental dishes. But the pedestaled cake of game and the turkey in the form of a swan on a socle and the odorous boned partridge were no more than river clay to Sam's blurred eyes. He caught none of the delicious aromas, the delicate poetic blending of game and spice and preserves. He was too confused then to understand the great poet's words; too shamed and baffled by the failure of his written poem to see the sheer beauty of his cooked one.

Miss Lacey was on her feet again, indomitable. "We bow to a master," she said. "But in our small way, we have a master too. You shall hear Mr. Avery. He," Miss Lacey cried dramatically, "has been published in Boston!"

The poet nodded. But his real interest was in the cake of game. Sing-a-little helped him

to a second portion and refilled his wine goblet. "Mis' James," he reported to Sam, "say dat de flyin'-meat cake am de perfection o' de great Wadsworth an' de wine de spright o' Longfeller. I reckon, lak he say, Mis' Sam, yo' poem's a cooked one."

"I reckon," Sam growled darkly, "and that ain't the kind calculated to win me back Amy. But, Sing-a-little, I ain't licked—set out the relishes and small dishes. I'm fixin' 'em so's Shakespeare himself would rather eat than listen."

"Yassuh!" Sing-a-little approved. "Mis' Sam, dat Avery's recitin' his poem, don' you listen, Mis, Sam, don' you go to watchin' Miss Amy an' grievin'."

Sam hovered over the spread dishes of the next course, fighting to perfect perfection. When he'd finished he went at the remaining course. He lit into forbidden stores, into goods waybilled to river merchants, appropriating what he needed. Come Mr. Tooker's appreciation he'd pay for what he took. He wouldn't need it for marrying money now. He'd not only shown Amy that he hadn't much culture or beauty, he'd shown her that he was a fool, trying to fight for her with weapons about which he knew nothing.

But nobody in the whole valley would ever forget his dinner today. They'd talk about that long after Le Grande Avery's verse was dead and forgotten. Fillet of eels, butter-fried oysters, baskets of picked squirrel meat, salmi of woodcock; the arrangements of pickles and croquettes and watermelon rind and crisp radishes and cold cuts and jellies . . . each became a perfect verse in the poem that Sam was fashioning.



AT THE peek-hole, stealing a second, Sam tried not to look at Amy. She was spiritedly applauding Le Grande's poem. Le Grande's opening verses had been worthy; far better than his own, Sam admitted to himself. He named the river, in lyric rhythm, the Smile of God as the Indians had done, weaving into his poem the ancient and beautiful legends of the vanished red dwellers. It was epic and grand and Sam could understand how he had charmed Amy, blinding her to commonplace matters.

"I must say," Ruez James was saying, "that Mr. Avery writes with skill and ability. His verse is excellent."

"Better than the cooked ones?" Miss Lacey asked archly.

"Well," the poet said, sucking a tooth, "neck and neck, let us say. Neither poem is yet finished."

"Man, man!" Sing-a-little gasped. "He won't say. Mis' Sam, it's a duel, dat's what! Ise pray-in' fo' you, suh!"

"Well, stop prayin'," said Sam, "and get to helping me. Whip up the pinanciere for the quail garnish; it needs but a smitch of thyme and bay to satisfy Napoleon himself."

Sam's fingers flew. Desperately he dredged from his mind every trick of flavoring and enticement and culinary blandishment that Jacob Downer and his own experience had taught him. Sam wished that he could fight with his fists; physically beat Le Grande as he often had when they were boys and he'd had to rescue Amy or one of the girls from a hair-pulling at Le Grande's hands.

Le Grande's measured voice beat on Sam's ears like a portentous thunder as he checked the main course. Pigeon pies, sweetbreads, lamb cutlet-St. Cloud, gray duck, rice birds on toast, yellow-leg snipe swimming in game-smelling gravy, form of hull corn. "Moddy," Sam muttered, "fetch out the fodder dishes now . . . there's lima beans, oyster plant, baked stuffed tomatoes, sweet potatoes and cauliflower à la Saybrook Point, crust of mushroom. . . Moddy, give me the herb case, I got to do some final blending."

Sam sent the course in as the saloon applauded Le Grande's verses. But suddenly Sam heard another burst of applause. It was for him—for his main course, steaming on the silver platters on the side tables.

"Mr. James laugh an' tell dat Avery he got to go some to lick dis course," Sing-a-little grinned. "Mis' Sam, you won dat skirmish, I 'llow."

It made Sam feel good. But it didn't slow him up any. A proper poem would have a punch at the end to make folks sit up and notice and a good dinner had to have the same. He had to keep fighting. There'd be pastries and confections and fruits and preserves and liqueurs yet. Sam reckoned he could hold his own with them against Le Grande. But he chose for his real punch, his knockout blow, the ornamental confections. Sam had, in colored sugar and cream and well-baked dough, Faneuil Hall and a Chinese Pagoda and the Frigate *Constellation* and the *Valley Queen* in winter and the State House at Hartford.

Now in a sudden great inspiration Sam called for a cake form and he set Moddy and his men to mixing sugar paste and he peeled off his broadcloth and hugged the pastry board. He could do no more to perfect his dinner; now he'd add to it, create a confection the like of which had never been seen before and would never be forgotten.

Danger Disbro came, complaining that he was behind time, and wanting to hook the *Valley Queen* up again.

"Don't you dare," Sam said, icing down the foundation of his masterpiece, "the diners set the pace today, not you or me. If you

hook her up the vibration'll ruin the whole meal."

He shooed Danger off. Sam laid his groundwork: a level ploughed field and in the background the lofty crags of the Holyoke range. He worked fast. Moddy's pickaninny folded and filled the icing bags as he called for them. He heated bricks nearby to hasten the setting. The waiters came and went, eyes rolling at what Sam was doing, serving course after course.

Le Grande's poem went on, each set of verses a story within the whole, each bringing applause.

Mr. Tooker came, reporting that Ruez James seemed to be dozing between courses and not taking much interest in anything but the dinner, and that pleased Sam. Mr. Tooker was pleased too. He reckoned that everybody was enthusiastic over the passage and the fine dinner. "They'll be missionaries," Mr. Tooker beamed, not minding Sam pushing him out of the way, "fifty missionaries for the *Valley Queen*, Mr. Daball. You count your pay careful come Saturday. I'm mighty appreciative, Mr. Daball."

Sam didn't care about that. He'd lost his chance to be famous in the way Amy wanted him to be and the extra money didn't mean anything now.

He guessed that now, with himself bringing the matter to a head, challenging so to speak, and losing so shamefully that Amy wouldn't be wanting him to court her any more.



SAM finished his confection. The waiters, two to a sugar-piece, waited for Le Grande's last verses to finish; ready to place them in the center of the table and surround them with the after-dinner snacks that folks lingered over in good talk and cigar smoke. He entrusted his masterpiece to Sing-a-little alone. Even now, with it gleaming and delicious on the huge tray, Sam could see a weakness. The icing hadn't set quite enough. He'd not taken the time to build the proper straw base for strength. Sing-a-little would have to be almighty careful to set it on the table in one piece.

"It looks lak de Patriarch Ab'aham," Sing-a-little said with admiration. "My, see dem whiskers!"

It did, Sam agreed. But then so did Ruez James. Sam's confection showed Mr. James, standing beside his plough and team on his own farm under the Holyokes. The great poet had his feet deep in the turned earth, resting from his ploughing. But his great shaggy head was turned to the sky, his arms outspread, drawing from the heavens an inspiration for a poem.

A light like the light that angels shed fell

over the figure and the scene that had same quality which is present in a holy painting. Sam knew that he'd made pastry history; that nobody would ever forget the artistry or perfection or the complete timeliness of his great confection.

"Serve," whispered Sam, when the clapping for Le Grande had ceased, and went to the peep-hole.

Sam reckoned afterwards that he'd never felt so proud in his life. Folks were generous and kind to his Pagoda and the State House and such common confectations, saying, "Ah!" and the ladies cute-screaming in delight. But when his masterpiece was carefully placed in the center of the table, their admiration stifled words and they just gazed and were speechless.

Mr. James bowed his head, like a man receiving a blessing; Le Grande Avery scowled darkly and Amy clapped her hands and looked at Sam. But Sam didn't look back. There was a waver and indecision in her eyes, an uncertainty that Sam didn't want to see. Sam turned away and as he did so he heard something that turned his heart to ice.

Three signal raps broke the rapt silence. Full speed ahead! Full speed—and the paddle beat and engine thump that would shatter his great confection and disintegrate his lesser ones! The great dinner ruined; a day of triumph to be remembered only as the day he had failed twice! He heard Mr. Potts, the engineer, shuffle to his grating and shut off the steam by-pass for high pressure.

"No!" cried Sam and shivered. "No!"

But even as Sam cried he watched the solution of his difficulties.

Amy Disbro suddenly pushed back her chair and reached beneath the table cloth. From Le Grande Avery's hands she snatched a heavy walking stick. She stood up. Then she marched with small quick steps to the bulkhead between the saloon and the engine room and she rapped the cane twice on the wooden staving.

"Slow speed, Mr. Potts," Amy cried to the bulkhead. "Two raps. That signal wasn't from the pilot, Mr. Potts." And then she marched back to her chair and she broke the stick in two over its back and threw them into the lap of Le Grande Avery. Sam did not miss the fire in her eyes nor the angry set of her face as she turned from Le Grande and climbed the stairway to the deck above. And there was something else in her face too that sent Sam scurrying into his broadcloth.

"Mis' Sam," said Sing-a-little, "Ise scared you is plumb licked. Dat Mr. James, he done fall soun' asleep in his chiyar an' he ain't doin' no decidin' 'bout nuthin'! Ma Goshness, he not ev'n stir when dat Avery rap de full speed signal, suh!"

"Let him sleep," grinned Sam, and brushed back his hair. "Poets don't matter right now, I reckon. Sing-a-little, take over . . . I expect to be busy a while."

And as Sam dashed aloft to where he knew Amy would be waiting he tried not to remember that poetry was a window to the soul. Tarnation! If you figured that way he still wasn't much. Unless, of course, you figured also that Amy had seen enough of the souls of the writing kind of poets that had set Mr. James to worrying so about the future of his great America.

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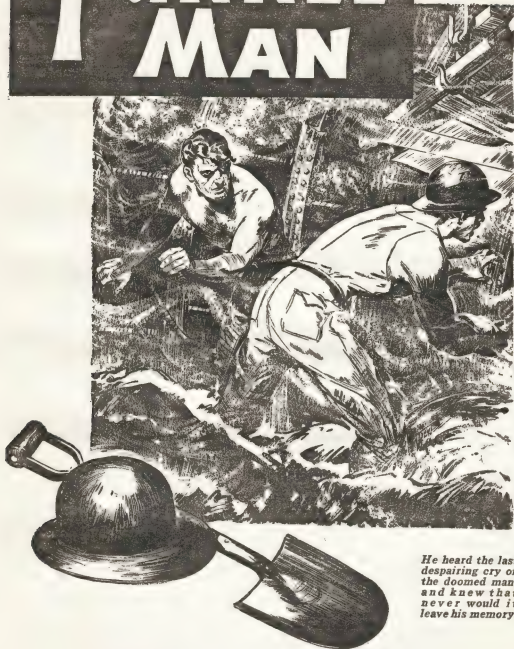
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DARE-DEVIL ACES

TUNNEL MAN



*He heard the last
despairing cry of
the doomed man,
and knew that
never would it
leave his memory.*

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By WILBUR S. PEACOCK



THERE was a balance here, a meeting of high-pressure air and sludgy crushing earth, and if the balance tipped one way, forty men would die in a mole-warren ninety feet beneath the surface of the river. There was noise, as though the tunnelmen had tapped the bedlam of hell, for air roared and iron clanged on iron, and the men's voices were whispers in the gale of sound.

This was hogging at its mightiest; and Shawn Keever soaked it in, as he had done for seven

years, and his pride in his men was a tangible thing.

He worked at the face, flat muscles ridging in his wide back, his skin oily with perspiration. The razor-keen shovel slashed at the cold gray sand, and the muck slid between his legs, dropping to the floor, where the muckers shoveled with the rhythm of machines, filling the insatiable maws of the cars which came and went over the strips of rail leading to the muck lock and outside.

"Is good!" Sven Borgerson, his partner said, wiping sweat from his face. "We make plenty speed now."

They grinned at each other, and looked around at the gang, feeling satisfied and confident and strangely content.

"Yeah!" Shawn Keever said, and felt the lack of tension in the gang. Going had been tough this past week, for the ground had changed, the earth marbly and rough. He had seen volcanic rubble like that before, and it had been dangerous, ready to blow at the first mistake of the miners.

But now the muck was mostly dirty sand, and the work went smoothly, and the strain had eased. The men would work O.K. now, and he could go back to his new office, permitting some less experienced man to handle the job.

He slashed again at the face, glad that the working time was almost up. Work one hour and rest five, that was the routine, for no man could take any more than that, not with forty pounds of high air crushing at his body. The pressure was like a flood, washing over his body, clamping and hindering every movement, and it never ceased, continually fed by the roaring feeder pipes from the compressors on the surface.

He faced the cut with boards, stuffing hay between them, and tightening all with a screw-jack. Sven touched his shoulder, and he saw the new gang walking through the shifting fog the high pressure eternally caused. He nodded, then laid his shovel aside and climbed from the webbing, dropping to the sodden floor, boots splashing water which continually seeped despite the high air.

"How's she going?" Mike Jenson yelled above the clamor of the tunnel, and grinned when Shawn Keever circled thumb and forefinger in a sign. Nodding, he climbed into pocket three at the face and caught up a shovel.

"Let's go," Sven called, and went ahead, about the muck cars and down the line of rails to the man lock.



SHAWN KEEVER followed, automatically watching the new men take over. Always it gave him a thrill, for tools changed hands, and the rhythm of the work was not disrupted. Sweaty tired giants, Singhalese and Irish and Poles and Italians and a dozen other nationalities, turned their jobs over to fresh men, and went tiredly along the tunnel. Iron still clanged on iron, and the miners scooped muck back to the men below. The iron gang laid huge, curved scales where the shield had inched forward; and to Shawn Keever there was drama in the matter-of-factness with which the men labored. Death waited patiently for one to make a mistake; yet the gang never fal-

tered, inching their arrogant way through the earth, building, always building, for a better world.

He liked that thought, and nursed it in his mind, as he went along the tracks. Slowly the clamor dulled behind, and the fog grew tighter, the electric lights like fireflies, barely glimmering. He stepped aside to let a hogger pass, and then whirled, one heavy hand darting out to clamp on the other's sleeve.

"What the hell you doing here, Barton?" he snapped.

Tom Barton was an old man; he was fifty, and in the tunnels, fifty was like ninety on the surface. His hair was gray and his face lined, but the muscles of his naked chest were like massive snakes coiling beneath his skin.

He stood now, watching, and there was no expression in his eyes. He wrenched from Shawn Keever's grip, and his legs were braced, for he knew the temper of the man he faced.

"I'm the heading boss, Keever," he said.

"You're a liar, you're a stinking liar!" Shawn Keever said. "No company on God's green earth would hire you."

Tom Barton ran his gaze up and down the younger man, as though seeing him for the first time. There was patience in his eyes then, a tolerance oddly at variance with his clenched fists.

"You had your say, Keever, you spoke your mind, and nothing came of it. Now get out of my way."

"Why?" Shawn Keever said, and the words shut them away from the world. "I ain't yellow, I ain't afraid. I've never run from anything or anybody. And, Barton, I've never murdered three men."

Tom Barton hit him then, throwing the blow like a rocket, grunting.

He threw the blow, and came in for more, reaching with bludgeoning fists. His face was white, and anger slitted his eyes, but he made no sound that Shawn could hear.

The knuckles caught Shawn Keever's face, ripped the skin, and then slid by. He went to one side, tiny bells ringing in his head, and brought up against the slimy wall. Rage struck at him then, and he braced his legs, hurtling out, both hands swinging. He slashed at Barton with incredible speed, driving the hogger before him, dropping him slackly. Barton lay on his side, shaking his head, trying to rise.

And then men were pressing in, holding Shawn Keever back with calloused hands. He didn't fight; he watched Barton come to his feet. He'd waited a long time to take a punch at Barton; it had felt good to have the shock of the blows run up his arms.

Tom Barton rubbed his mouth, and then turned away, going toward the face. Surprise tightened the hoggers' faces; no one could remember Barton ever turning from a fight.

Shawn Keever jerked his arms free, and stalked to the man lock. Others followed, saying nothing, watching speculatively as he bent and entered the lock. For a moment, he wasn't one of them; he was set apart, and the knowledge burned and rankled in his mind.

The rubber-gasketed door came to with a slight thud; and then the lock-tender hit the valve, and the air began to bleed. Men hawked and spat, equalizing the pressure, and the needle on the air valve slowly cruised downward from forty pounds.

This was decompression, the interminable waiting after each shift, when pressure had to be lowered gradually. Without decompression, men got caisson disease, the bends, and their bodies bloated and twisted with the agonies of hell. Absorbed nitrogen in the blood did that, unless it was permitted to seep slowly away under gently-lowering pressure.

Shawn Keever had time to think in those moments; and slowly the white rage faded from his mind, leaving only the cold hate he had felt for so long a time.



IT HAD begun when Tommy had died, Tommy and two others. The blow had come in a second shift, and Barton had been the crew chief. Disaster had struck in one flashing second of eternity; and when the blow was over, three men had died in the swirling muck.

Shawn Keever blamed Tom Barton. He heard the stories, heard how Barton had lost his nerve and run like the rest, leaving three men to fight a battle predestined to failure. The Court of Inquiry had cleared Barton, whitewashing his actions, for none of the hogs could remember clearly just what had happened. But Shawn Keever had known better. He had pieced the story together, a fragment at a time, and at last he felt he knew exactly what had happened. Barton had turned yellow; and for that, Shawn could find no excuse of any kind.

He thought of that, riding out the decompression, and no one spoke, for his face was like granite with the tenor of his thoughts. And when the outer lock surged open in a sigh of air, he was first through, pulling on the heavy shirt and jacket he wore outside.

He stepped into the cage which lifted the miners to the surface of the earth; and when the cage was crowded, the walls began to slide past, wet and shining like a snake's belly. The cold of the sump pushed at them, and the first streaks of sunlight faded the glow of the electric bulbs. Then the cage was at the top, and the men were streaming off the gantry, going down the steps to the street.

Some laughed, calling remarks back and forth, and others went toward the company

restaurant for a drink or a meal. But Shawn Keever walked alone, going toward the front office. He saw Sven Borgerson lift his hand to call him over, then deliberately turned his head, so that the big Swede was out of his line of vision. He wanted nothing to do with anybody until he had talked to Vickers, the superintendent.

His boots echoed hollowly on the steps at the office, and the door was heavy under his hand. He ignored the girl at the desk, going back down the short hall and twisting the knob of Vickers' door. Inside, he paused, waiting.

"How it's going, Shawn?" Vickers asked, looking up from papers on his desk. He frowned, seeing the stillness of the hogger's face. "Is something wrong?"

"Yeah!" Shawn Keever said, pacing forward and dropping into a heavy chair. "Barton's working on the job."

"Oh!" Vickers' hands fumbled a cigar from a box and lit it with a table lighter. "Well, he's a good man."

"The hell he is!" Muscles knotted in Shawn Keever's jaw. "You know as well as I do that he murdered Tommy and the others."

Vickers shook his head. He was a contrast to the younger man, for his hair was white, his face soft from his years behind the desk. Once, he had been a hog, too, but the bends had caught him and shriveled his left leg, and now he let other men do the work he had once done.

"No!" he said flatly. "The Court of Inquiry cleared him, and its ruling is good enough for me." His tone softened. "Look, Shawn," he finished, "I know you thought a lot of your friend, but that's no reason to carry a grudge against Barton. Even granted that he lost his nerve for a moment, he still did a good job in trying to save those men; and I've been in this game long enough to know that losing your courage isn't a thing to be ashamed of."

"To hell with that," Shawn Keever said brittlely. "The tunnel's no place for yellowbellies; and the way the earth is there, there may be trouble any time. The men won't trust his judgment; get rid of him."

"No one else has complained; we'll let things ride." Vickers' tone was even and impersonal now. "You're young, Shawn, and a darned good hog, but all men can't be cut on your pattern. Forget it. You start your new job here in the morning; it'll keep you busy."

"O.K.!" Shawn Keever said grimly. "You're the boss, but I still don't have to like it."

Vickers nodded. "One more thing," he said quietly. "You, nor anybody else, can fire Barton without my sayso. Do you understand?"

Shawn Keever flushed; it was as though the old man had read his mind. His broad shoulders tightened, then relaxed, and he nodded.

"Good!" Vickers smiled for the first time. "I'll be gone about a month; do a good job." "Yes, sir," Shawn Keever said, and soft laughter sounded silently in his chest. "Yes, sir, I'll do a good job."



IT TOOK a week to bring about Shawn Keever's plan. It was simple and direct, and the big hogger grinned when he thought of it. He wasn't subtle or abstruse, but to the point; and if the men whispered and talked, he didn't care, for they meant nothing to him at the moment.

With Vickers gone, the task was easy. He did the office work as quickly as he could, taking no pleasure in it as he thought he would. The easy laughter erased itself from his mouth, and his eyes were suddenly hard. He still haunted the company restaurant, but the men began to avoid him, for his words were always questions, and the questions sought only to find marks of inefficiency against Tom Barton.

"You're a fule, Shawn," Sven Borgerson told him on the sixth day. "Tom Barton is a gude man. The accident, she was bad, but no man says it was Barton's fault."

Shawn Keever turned away, eyes burning. Sven was his friend, but he hated him at the moment. He was like the rest, complacent, not giving a damn about the three who had died. To hell with him and all the rest.

He couldn't understand their attitude. They knew hogging was built on teamwork; let one make a mistake and he could murder the rest. They lived on borrowed time in a rat hole where only a billowing curtain of air kept the river from their lungs. And yet they could work side by side with a man who had murdered three of their friends.

He couldn't understand, nor did he try now. Months, he had waited for this opportunity, and now that it was here, he meant to exploit it to the fullest.

He faced Tom Barton on the seventh day, making him stand before the desk. Strangely, he felt sorry for the man; then memories crowded into his mind, and his voice was cold.

"You'll muck, Barton," he said. "Let's see if you can keep the cars full."

Tom Barton nodded. "I'll swing a shovel, Keever," he said, "because you're my boss."

Shawn Keever blinked. This wasn't at all what he thought would happen. From heading boss to mucker was one hell of a bounce; he knew he'd never take it himself.

"That's all," he said.

But Tom Barton didn't move. He stood before the desk, and his gray hair looked white in the window's light. There was no anger in his tone when he spoke, and his hands were relaxed at his side.

"You're tough, Keever," he said. "You're tough in your mind, and I feel sorry for you. You think, because you're big, that you're a man."

"Get out!" Shawn Keever felt the shaking of his hands. "Get out before I throw you out."

Tom Barton nodded. "You could do that," he admitted. "You could do that to any man on the job. You've got muscles and guts, and you think that's the only yardstick with which to measure things. Son, you've got a lot to learn."

He turned then and left the office. The sound of his footsteps on the hall floor came back dimly, walking steadily, vibrating.

Shawn Keever felt like a boy then, spiteful and childishly revengeful. Barton had taken the thing he had dished out; he had taken it, knowing why it was being done, and somehow, Shawn Keever had come off second best.

It was galling to know that. He had expected the man to plead, to ask for another chance. He wanted to see him crawl, to whine for help. And instead, Barton had taken everything and felt sympathy for the man who had done the thing to him.

"Yellow!" Shawn Keever said aloud. "Too yellow to fight back."

It came to him that he could be wrong, and he shrugged the thought away. The memory of Tommy's laughing face came whirling into his thoughts, Tommy who had gone with him on double dates, whose capacity for beer was a legend. They had roomed together for almost a year, and somehow, their dreams had been the same, rich and boundless.

And then he thought of the broken bodies he had seen brought up from the tunnel. Tommy's had been first, and his laughter was stilled forever, his hands dangling limply over the stretcher's side.

He'd never forget that; he didn't want to. Barton had done that when he lost his head, and now Barton would have to pay for his cowardice. When Shawn Keever was through with him, he'd be broken, whipped completely.

Shawn Keever nursed that thought the next three days. His work had doubled, for he had had to take over Barton's old shift. Other hogs had more years in the tunnel than he, but he was more capable, as he had proved, and so he took the shift and drove the men.

Somehow, something had gone from the picture in the days he had been away. The hogs worked as a unit, yet they managed to keep him on the outside of their group. They laughed at his jokes, and their faces lost all humor the moment they turned away. The old spirit of oneness could not be recaptured; and baffled, he gave up after a time.

His only pleasure then lay in watching Tom Barton sweating over the muck shovel, bend-

ing and straightening, lifting muck into the cars which never seemed to fill. He was too good a man for the job, and he knew it and the gang knew it, yet he worked stolidly, his calm gaze sliding over Shawn Keever's. He was a hogger, doing the job he was ordered to do; and Shawn Keever felt his anger boil when he saw the rest of the gang go out of their way to be nice to him.

It isn't right, he told himself; don't they know what kind of a man he is? He could find no answer, no answer that satisfied.



HE FELT incredibly alone, three days later, when the cage dropped to the depths on his shift. Sunlight vanished as if snuffed away, and the sickly yellow lights of the bulbs replaced it. Cold air pushed moistly at him, and he drew his coat tighter, huddling against the cage's side.

Nothing had changed. Barton still did his work, and the men seemed to have swung from Keever to the older man. Sourness was in Shawn Keever's mind, and it marked his face, even Sven avoiding him.

The cage stopped, and the men went toward the huge concrete bulkhead. Three iron cylinders thrust painted snouts from the concrete, one the lock through which the muck cars passed, the second, the man lock for the hoggers, and crowding the roof, as high as it could be placed, the emergency escape lock was a permanent reminder that death waited patiently inside the tunnel.

The men filed into the man lock, sitting on the long benches, and Shawn Keever pulled the lock shut, dogging it. "Hit it," he said, and the lock tender twisted the air valve.

Air screamed, pressure instantly clamping over the men. Heat burgeoned, and perspiration slicked the big bodies of the miners. Men hawked and blew, equalizing pressure, and the lock tender grinned; only he was accustomed to the changing pressure, for he did it with each shift.

The needle crawled the gauge's face, cruising, crowding the forty pound mark. Compression could be had fast, but decompression was necessarily slow. Seconds surged past, and then the scream of the air died. The lock tender opened the inner lock in a sighing of air, and the men streamed into the tunnel, going toward their jobs.

Shawn Keever came last, hearing the roar ahead. He could see Tom Barton, and wondered at the infinite capacity of the man to take abuse. He was yellow, that was admitted, yet he took the dirty work Keever had handed him, without complaint. Almost did Shawn feel shame for him; he could not understand the fear which must lie in the man's heart.

"How's it going?" he yelled at the crew chief of the relieved crew, and nodded at the other's O.K. sign.

He went ahead, automatically checking everything about the job. The iron gang rode the working platform over the tunnel, and the clang of their hammers and wrenches was a vibrant note against the heavy booming of the air rushing from the feeders.

A muck car snaked past, filled with silmy sand, and another took its place. Muck slid from the face, and the muckers scooped it into the new car, never seeming to pause, the muck-pile never decreasing. Tom Barton glanced up, as Shawn went by, and his eyes were blank of any emotion.

Shawn Keever avoided the stare; it seemed to read the thoughts in his mind, to uncover his emotions, and gullt touched his heart. Then he shrugged and climbed into his pocket, catching up a discarded shovel. "Let's go," he shouted to Sven, and bent to his task.

He felt the rush of strength he threw into every stroke of the keen shovel, and spread his legs to let the muck slip through the floor. It was like slicing soft cheese, and he worked fast, stopping now and then to face the cut with boards and hay, tightening them into place with the screwjack.

The dull roar of work hemmed him in as tightly as the piling air pressure. Sweat rolled down his shoulders, and he wiped his face with a blocky hand, his gaze checking the work. Fog from the high-air swirled in the tunnel, and men were like huge black ghosts plying giants' tools in a man-made hell.

He grinned to himself; this was his life, a good one, and he would have chosen no other. He liked the labor and the men, and the fight against the yielding earth was a personal thing, something against which he could throw his strength.

The minutes flowed one into the other, and the gang worked as an entity, never slacking, their few yelled words faint against the back-drop of hammering air and clanging of metal on metal. Other miners worked at the face, and leaning back, Shawn Keever could see that soon the shield would have to come forward.

He gave the signal, and the men paused briefly in their work. The hydraulic jacks spaced about the rear of the shield tightened and then kicked into motion. The shield inched forward, biting into the earth, and stopped at a hand signal from Shawn Keever.

Then the men worked again, and the tunnel had gained a few precious inches of length. The iron gang laid new scales of iron on the walls and bolted them tight. The miners slashed at the face, clearing the muck, and the muckers bent and straightened like machines clearing away the debris.

Satisfied, Shawn Keever turned to the face, lifting his shovel for the first stroke. Sven grinned at him, sweat staining his long face, and nodded in approval. Shawn Keever grinned, feeling the other's comradeship.

And the grin froze, the muscles of his face locking, when he heard the single piercing cry. "Blow, it's a blow!" the call went winging. "Dear God!" Shawn Keever whispered.

Pocket Five had blown, and now the miners fought frantically to stop the sucking avid mouth in the face with hay and boards.

"Run for it!" one screamed and the cry spread like flame in gas, burning each hogger, sending him hurtling toward safety at the rear of the tunnel.



SHAWN KEEVER squirmed on the platform, working his way toward the blown pocket. He could feel the hammering of his heart, for never had he been in a situation like this. He could see the wriggling face of the pocket, and wonder touched his mind at the sight. There was a whirlpool in the sand, sucking, spinning, spreading with incredible speed. Sand was melting from the face like sugar in water, flooding past the working platform and piling in dirty spreading blobs on the floor.

Air screamed shrilly, the pressure lowering, and the fog thickened like milk, until the lights were barely visible. A man clawed at the wall phone, screaming the warning into the mouthpiece, then darting on, leaving the receiver dangling.

Sand and muck were piling higher, the dirty stinking muck of a river's bottom, spreading like deadly mush, with fantastic speed.

Shawn Keever caught at a miner's shoulder, and jerked his thumb. "Get out," he bellowed, and took the man's place. His hands reached for sacks of hay and lengths of board, and he laughed deep within himself as he fought.

So this was a blow, so this was the thing which men feared. Hell, this was good, dangerous but good, a thing fit for the guts and muscles of a man.

He worked with feverish speed, locking the muscles of his legs against the vacuum of the face, feeding the gaping insatiable maw. Boards held for an infinitesimal moment, then splintered and disappeared, sucked into the belly of the earth. Sacks of hay vanished like chaff in a breeze. The sandy mouth pouted for more, growing, stretching wider, ever hungry.

Sven Borgerson fed Shawn Keever's hand, lifting boards and hay. His teeth gleamed whitely in his face, but cold calculation was in his eyes. He had lived through other blows, and in him was the knowledge of how far the battle could be fought before retreat was necessary, if victory could not be won.

The hole widened, crying with a banshee wail, gulping down the boards and hay as though they were the air itself. The muck piled higher, and Shawn had to work his legs to keep his feet free of the clinging death. Suction flipped the materials from his hands, boards and bags and tools now, sucking them out of sight in a single instant, and pleading for more.

Rushing air pushed at his wide back, throwing him forward, and he straightened with an effort, sensing for the first time that this thing was bigger than he. Anger tightened his mouth at the thought, and he screamed for boards, then watched them shrivel like feathers in a flame, disappearing.

"Run, Shawn," he heard Sven scream, and knew instinctively that it was the only thing to do.

He slipped from the pocket, sprawling. And it was then that the scream came from behind.

He saw the miner then, saw how the suction had caught his legs. He saw the fear in the man's face and the blood marking his hands where he clutched at the webbing.

He tried to move, and he couldn't. He could feel the terrible squeezing fear about his heart, and the knowledge that he was afraid was more terrible than the fear itself.

He heard the screaming of the air, heard the miner's cry muffled and distorted. It was as though they were alone in a shifting bellying cloud; and the fear within him drained his strength and bent him backward from the blow. He shook in the paralysis of terror, feeling the muck cold and slimy on his body.

"Oh, my God!" he whimpered, and turned to run.

He heard the last despairing cry of the doomed man, and he knew that never would it leave his memory. The muck clutched like wet fingers at his legs, and he took one driving step, trying to escape.

A figure clawed past him, shoving him to one side, and for the briefest of instants he saw Tom Barton's haggard face. Then the hogger was grasping at the miner's arm.

"Sven!" a deep voice bellowed, and the big Swede was bulling forward, throwing his weight into the fight, catching the miner's arm with one mighty hand, the other braced on the webbing for leverage.

The face screamed its defiance, sucking avidly. The miner was slack now, unconscious, not helping. Curdled milky air whirled and spun into the vacuum, straining to tear its victim free of the battling men.

"Ho!" the Swede cried, and he and Barton surged with waning strength.

The miner came free, and the air whined shrilly in defeat. Shawn Keever watched, still paralyzed, and the sobbing cries of terror in his throat were more terrible than anything he

could remember. He saw Tom Barton and Sven stagger free, carrying the limp victim, and he couldn't move, even when the men fell in the sliding muck. He watched, and his muscles were locked and wooden.

Then the rescue squad was at the face, helping the men. Others came with fresh boards and sacks of hay, feeding them in desperate speed to the spinning vortex of the maelstrom. The boards vanished instantly, and the hay could not hold. Then men staggered up, bearing the great curved plates which the iron gang laid for the tunnel's wall. They tossed them up into the face, and the suction whirled them like bits of paper. One caught, and then a second, and two more locked into place.

The air began to moan, instead of scream, and the hay and boards caught and held. Pressure began to build; and then men were at the pocket, finishing packing the blow, stifling its power. The feeder pipes bellowed deeply, and the air began to clear as high-air piled up again.

The face was packed tightly again, and the danger was past. Muck was deep in the tunnel, and one man's arm had a second joint between shoulder and wrist. The rescued miner was being carried toward the man lock, head lolling, blood streaming from his ears and nose.

"Sven!" Tom Barton called, and stopped before Shawn Keever.

"Yah!" the big Swede said, and reached out for Shawn Keever's arm.

He went with Barton and Sven, not because he wanted to, but because there was no strength in his body. He was mentally blinded for the moment, still appalled by the flashing horror of the past moments, and he breathed with great sucking gasps.

Men watched, some not understanding, some wonderingly. Then Sven and Barton had him at the man lock and were placing him on a bench. Shawn Keever began to cry then, sobbing like a boy, as though he would never stop.

"What happened to him?" he heard the lock tender ask.

"He lost his nerve," Tom Barton answered softly, and his tone was even and without condemnation.



SHAWN KEEVER thrust the last of his shirts into the suitcase, strapping it closed, and then placing it on the floor. He could hear the sounds of traffic from the street, and the breeze through the window was warm on his face.

He waited, not wanting to walk the street until just minutes before his train.

Two days had passed since the blow, and he had not gone down again. Vickers was

back, a telegram had caused him to catch the first plane. But Shawn Keever had not seen him, for he knew what must be in the other's mind.

And as though the thought were a signal, Vickers came through the door, bracing himself laboriously with his canes. His eyes were shadowed with his thoughts, and they swung from the packed suitcase to the big man at the window.

"Leaving, Keever?" he asked.

"Yeah," the hogger said, without turning.

"Why? The Court of Inquiry found you blameless."

"Sure!" Cynicism twisted Shawn's mouth. "So what? The men know I lost my nerve; they'll never trust me again."

"Ummm!" Vickers' head nodded in understanding. "I've heard talk."

"O. K.!" Shawn Keever whirled. "What am I supposed to do—go back and take the cracks? Look, I'm no fool!"

"Just plain yellow, huh?"

"Listen," Shawn Keever said, and his fists clenched, "maybe I did lose my nerve in the tunnel, but that don't make me yellow all the time. If anybody wants to argue the point, I'm willing to take him on."

Vickers nodded, leaning against the door. "Still think Tom Barton was so much to blame?" he asked.

"O.K., I was wrong."

"Rode him kind of hard, didn't you?"

"Maybe."

"Did you tell him so?"

"Why should I?" Anger blazed in the hogger's eyes. "He played the hero, didn't he? Why should I have to take his cracks!"

"Shawn," Vickers said then, "I guess maybe it's a good thing you're leaving. I misjudged you. Anyway, I gave your job to Barton."

"Oh!" Shawn Keever's breath was a tiny sigh.

"Yes! And I rather imagine that, if you stayed, you'd be on the business end of a mucker's shovel."

"Like that, huh?"

"Like that."

Shawn Keever caught up his suitcase, swinging it easily in one big hand. He tried to read the thoughts behind Vickers' face, and failed. A glance at his wrist watch told him he barely had time to catch his train.

"So long, Shawn," Vickers said.

The suitcase hit the bed, springs creaking in protest. Then Shawn Keever was past the superintendent and into the hall.

"Where you going, Shawn?" Vickers asked. "Hey, you've forgotten your suitcase."

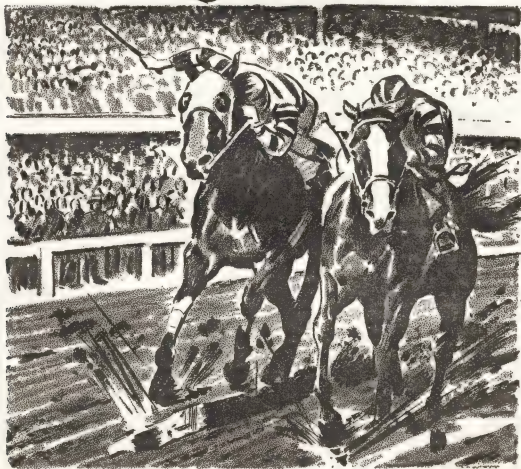
Shawn was grinning. "You win, Vickers," he said. "You've got yourself a new mucker. See you later—I've got some apologizing to do that can't wait."

WHISTLER'S MUDDER



*From the moment the webbing lifted,
they were all fighting for the rail,
and in that mob, anything could go.*

ILLUSTRATED
BY
JOHN MEOLA



By WILLIAM CAMPBELL GAULT

HE IS A elegant horse," Whistler said. "He comes from a fine family. He ain't no dog, this Humidity."

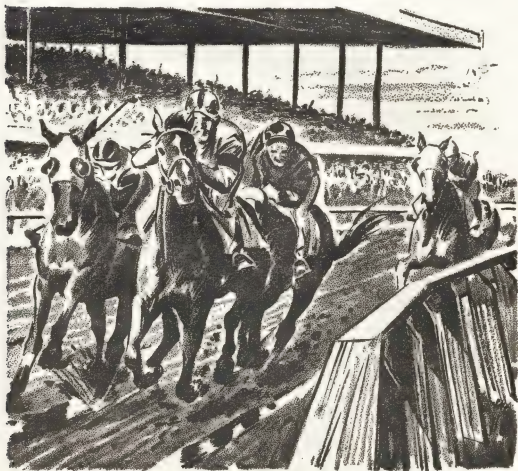
I said nothing. What was there to say? I had been a cold fish. I had been a good, careful, thoughtful boy for a month. I had played the bangtails coldly and carefully, with great self-discipline, with skill and with luck. I had amassed fifteen hundred leaves of legal cabbage. That's a little less than the national debt, I'll admit, but still, it's something. It's comforting.

I had entrusted it to my good and true friend

Whistler. With it, I had entrusted some words. The words stated that Whistler should take said money to a bank and there deposit it to my account. This was in the morning, and I didn't want to leave the track. I wanted to stay there and clock a couple of goats which were rumored as sleepers.

It was now afternoon. We were in the Derby Tap, a cozy little joint near the track. Whistler was having a double hamburger and some clam chowder and a cheese sandwich. I was having a cup of coffee to go with my bad temper.

Whistler went on, and on . . . "He almost won



some races. His luck ain't been too good, that's all."

"Almost won?" I asked. "You mean he's copped some seconds? You mean he's finished in the money?"

"Well, not exactly," Whistler said. "He finished seventh, last time out. That's been about his best, so far, but—"

"How many horses in that race?"

"Eight," Whistler gulped, and looked away. He looked back. "You mad at me, Jeff? You think I done wrong?"

I remembered the time, on my birthday, Whistler had given me the watch I wore. With his last sixty bucks, he'd done that. "I'm a little annoyed with you," I said. "You know I didn't want a horse. You know Feather and I planned on getting married with that money. What would I do with a horse, Whistler? Was it because I bet on the horse? Is that what gave you the idea?"

"He looked so lonely," Whistler said. "He whinnied at me."

I thought of Whistler walking to the bank with fifteen hundred dollars in one big hand. He'd be whistling, of course. He was always whistling. I thought of Sam Axer sizing that situation up, as he walked by the stable, whistling. A big lug with a handful of money. And Sam with a horse, a horse, according to Sam, that needed only a muddy day to bring in a whole hat-full of mazuma. Of course.

I sighed. "You can have him," I said. "If Sam doesn't want him back, under what pressure I can put on him, the horse is yours, Whistler. A little present from me."

"Gee," the big lug said. "Gee, t'anks."

"And now," I said, "if you'll give me a double-sawbuck, I've got something nice in the third tomorrow. I used what money I had this afternoon. My luck was bad, all day."

"I got three fish," Whistler said. "I ain't got no double-sawbuck."

I looked at him the way I used to look at him. When I'd been a squad leader and Whistler the guy who was always trying to beat any details. I said coldly, "How come?"

Whistler looked inside of his cheese sandwich. "They don't put no cheese in these things," he said. "I was robbed. They—"

"How come?" I repeated.

"You ain't no staff sergeant no more," Whistler said. "Don't look at me like that. I'm bigger'n you, Jeff."

"I'm waiting," I said, "for your answer."

"O.K., O.K. I had to have some feed, didn't I? And a stable? I had to have a boy to exercise him, to ride him. You don't get that for peanuts."

"No," I admitted, "you don't." I looked at him and shook my head. I gulped the big gulp. I tried to think of something biting to say, but then I remembered New Guinea.

We'd gone through that campaign together. It had been a long campaign.

Whistler said, "It's just saving, that's all. It's putting something away for a rainy day. That's all we need, now—a rainy day."

"Sure," I said. "Sure. Don't worry about it. Let me do the worrying."

"You always do," he said. "It saves me the trouble."



WE parted, there at the Derby Tap. Whistler had a western movie he wanted to see. I wanted to see Feather; I had a date with her for supper. But first, I wanted to see Sam Axer.

I found Sam at his stables. He was a thin and sharp-eyed man, a gypsy trainer. A man with three horses and no scruples.

He looked at me suspiciously when I came into the gloom of his stable. "Something wrong?" he asked.

"Whistler bought a horse from you," I said.

"That's right."

"Only it wasn't Whistler's money. It was mine. I'll take it, now."

There was a pitchfork leaning against the wall near the stable door. Sam had that in his hands, suddenly. "Get out of here," he said, and his nasal voice was ugly. "If Whistler stole that dough, have him arrested. Don't come bothering me about your troubles."

I think he wanted an excuse to use that pitchfork. His eyes weren't pleasant, but they looked like they were enjoying this.

It was his stable. I left, saying no more, excepting to myself.

I walked down shed row to the stable recently rented by my boy. There was a horse in here, a chestnut, the animal called Humidity. He looked, as Whistler had said, lonesome. He looked sad. Considering that, once a race was under way, he never enjoyed the company of the other horses, he had a reason to look lonesome. He whinnied when he saw me, a dismal, hopeful whinny.

From the darkness of a corner, somebody said, "Easy, lad. It's all right, boy."

A figure came out from the dimness, a thin kid, with a thin face and eyes that had seen too much. "He's high-spirited," the kid said, "but he won't hurt you. He's really a gentle horse."

The understatement of the week, that last sentence.

"You're the boy Whistler hired?" I asked.

He nodded. "He's quite a man, huh? You ever hear him whistle Nola? He sure is a nice fellow."

"That he is," I admitted. "He's also a very fast man with a dollar. Particularly my dollars."

"Who are you?" he asked.

"My name is Jeff," I told him. "Jeff Cornell. I'm the man who paid for the horse that Whistler bought."

"Oh," he said. "Sure. You're his buddy. He was talking about you. He said I'd probably wind up taking orders from you, on account of you were a sergeant in the war and and you never quite got over it."

"Hmmm," I hummed. "Did he also happen to mention it was my money that bought this horse? Did he mention it was my money that put the clothes on his back and the food in his big mouth?"

"No, he didn't. He told me he bought you a wrist watch, though."

I tried not to show my annoyance. I tried to remember the New Guinea campaign, but it was getting hazy.

"You're a jockey?" I asked.

"Mr. Whistler said I was everything in this stable, jockey and trainer and exercise boy and swipe. I guess that's the way it is, isn't it?" His thin face was turned up hopefully, and I realized the answer was important to him.

I said, "That's the way it is. Tell me, what do you think of Humidity? As a race horse, I mean, now, not as a friend to man."

He gave it some thought. He was searching his mind, I could tell. Finally he came up with, "He'll do all right. He could make some money for you. He'll have to be handled right, of course."

"Of course," I said. "But he certainly doesn't look like a race horse. Though I don't pretend to be a judge."

"No race horse looks like one," he said, which is more or less true.

"What's your name?" I asked him.

"Joey Lynch," he told me.

"Well, Joey, I was going to give this horse to Whistler, but I've changed my mind. I'll be your boss, and I'll find a place to scratch up your salary, so don't worry. I'll do the worrying."

Joey nodded. "That's the way Mr. Whistler told me it would be."

I left my newly acquired stable and staff, then, and drove back to town in the 1934 model I laughingly refer to as a car. In town, I drove directly over to the office of Wright and Flayer, the realtors, the place where Feather works.



FEATHER was waiting out in front, and I realized I was five minutes late. Some day, I'd be too late. Some day, Feather would decide I wasn't the kind of guy

worth a wait.

She's got sort of reddish-gold hair and greenish-blue eyes and a pin-up figure and a complexion like the top of the bottle. She's got

a habit of needing me about my way of earning a living.

"Car break down?" she asked, as she stepped in.

"Why, no," I said. "Did you notice some change in it?"

"You're late. I thought perhaps—"

"Whistler," I explained. "All my money I gave to Whistler, to take to the bank. A man swindled him out of it."

"Fifteen hundred dollars?" she said, looking straight ahead.

"Fifteen hundred dollars," I admitted.

"At what odds?" she asked. "How much would you have had, if the horse won?"

I stared at her, trying not to believe what I was hearing.

"The horse you bet the fifteen hundred on," she explained further. "What were the odds?"

"I didn't bet it," I said. "You're accusing me of lying, Feather."

No words from her. A silence often described as stony and her eyes looking straight ahead and skepticism looking alien on that lovely face.

"Feather," I said, "you didn't mean it. I couldn't lie to you. You know that. Say you didn't mean it."

Nothing, no words.

I stopped in front of the little restaurant where we usually ate. I opened the door on her side, and she got out, and we walked into the restaurant without a word.

We sat down, and ordered, and then she looked at me. I had begged enough. There's a limit to my humility. I waited.

"I believe you," she said.

I was beginning to get all warm inside, when she added, "But it doesn't make any difference. There's no future ahead for us. Not the way you're living now, Jeff."

We had talked about that before. I said, "All I want is two thousand dollars. Once I get that, the ponies will run without any help from me. That's what I need for that sporting goods store. If my GI loan had been approved, I'd have gone into it, right away."

"But the horses? Why the horses?"

"Because for seven years prior to my induction, I was the handicapper on this town's biggest paper. Because it's the only thing I know right now."

"And what's wrong with Wright and Flayer? Do you realize the kind of commissions you'd make there? You'd get your two thousand."

"Sure," I said. "Sure. Selling six thousand dollar houses to veterans for ten thousand dollars. I can't use the kind of money they're making, Feather."

There was one of those silences again.

I said, "Don't get me wrong. You get paid for secretarial work. Your money's clean enough."

"Well," she said, "thanks for that anyway." She wanted to say some more. She was turning it over in her mind, I could tell. Finally, she said some more. "And what about Whistler?"

I stiffened. "What about him?"

"You've been carrying him a long time. Is he the kind of friend you favor, Jeff? Is there any reason why you carry him? Can you tell me why?"

I thought, there's no reason why. Excepting there'd been times when you wondered if this democracy didn't come a little too high, if it was quite worth the struggle. When you were a little weary of it, and you'd hear that whistle and see that moronic face, like a tonic. When you realized a first-rate unconscious comic is better than good officers or expensive equipment, when it ranked with good chow. But what kind of reason is that?

"It's nothing I can explain," I said. "Excepting that he's a good, simple, generous guy, the kind I like."

"He's not the kind I like," she said.

She didn't mean it, I know. She didn't know him well enough to judge him, either way. She was annoyed and unhappy and disappointed and she wanted to hurt me. She had.

I said, "I don't think we speak the same language."

She rose then, and I didn't try to stop her. There were all kinds of things I should have said, but I said none of them. All she said was, "Good-bye, Jeff," and she was walking toward the door, and I thought it would be time now, to say something, but I didn't.

It wasn't too late to cancel our orders, which I did. I didn't feel like eating.

I drove over to the Derby Tap and had a couple of drinks (65 percent neutral spirits). They didn't taste too bad, so I had a couple more, and they were all right, too.

Whistler came in a little later. He was still in a glow. "What a picture," he said. "Boy, what a picture."

"Lot of shooting?" I said.

"Plenty. Roy Rogers, what an actor." He laid a ten dollar bill on the bar. "Next one's on me," he said.

My eyes went from the ten to his face and he suddenly looked sheepish. I said nothing. He said nothing.

So I said, "You told me you were down to three dollars."

He nodded. "I was. Honest, Jeff. But I dropped in at Bud's, after the show."

Bud's was a pool room. "Well?" I said.

"Guy in there figured he could shoot pool."

"Oh," I said.

"Forty-three slugs," Whistler said, "before he'd admit he couldn't. A very stubborn guy."

"I'll take twenty," I said, "for that third race, tomorrow."

He gave me the twenty bucks. "I can't handle money," he said. "I might buy a horse, or something."

I put a hand on his shoulder. "It's all right, Whistler. Everything's all right."

"Sure," he said. "We'll get along."

We went back to our two rooms and bath. I sat by the window a long time, listening to Whistler snore. I sat there, thinking about Feather and some other things, but mostly Feather. Smoking and thinking and feeling sorry for myself, in my maudlin way. Only, she's so pretty, she's so damned pretty . . .

I couldn't sleep. It was a bad night.



IN the morning we went out to the track. Joey met us at the stable, looking a little thinner than usual, I thought. I asked him, "Did you eat this morning,

Joey?"

He nodded. "Sure, why? I eat every day. I get along."

"How old are you, Joey?"

He looked me straight in the eye. "Nineteen," he said.

I knew he wasn't. And I figured he was still growing; he had to work, to keep his weight down. But I had enough troubles, already.

He said, "Sam Axer was over this morning. He wants to know if you'll sell him the horse. He said he's willing to refund your money."

"Tnxay," Whistler said. "Nuts to him."

"And why not?" I asked.

Whistler looked uncomfortable. "Not for fifteen hundred. He'll go higher. Don't be in a hurry."

This was all beyond me. I said, "If this horse runs for us, he'll run in a claiming race, probably a fifteen hundred dollar claiming race. All Sam has to do is deposit the money, before the race, and the horse is his. You don't figure this for a stake horse, do you?"

"No." He didn't look directly at me. "But if he'll lay out fifteen hundred, something's cooking. He'll lay out more. And if he claims him, at least we'll get the purse, maybe. And we could wait for a two grand claimer, and—"

None of it made sense, of course. I had a chance to get back lost money. I was a fool if I didn't. But I remembered the pitchfork. "O.K.," I said finally, "we'll wait a while."

Whistler sighed, and I looked at him sharply, but there was nothing but blankness on that big face, nothing but innocence. Both of those had probably been on his face when that stubborn guy at Bud's had wanted to play pool. With Whistler, you can't always tell.

When I went over to the track to clock a couple, Whistler was explaining to Joey about his military career. "When I was fourteen," he said with a straight face, "I was a major

in the Air Corps, but when I transferred to the Infantry—"

Nothing of interest developed in the morning gallops. But this sleeper I'd picked for the third would make it a worthwhile day—of that I was sure. He was from a stable that wasn't always trying, but they'd be trying, today. And there was stable money on him. It looked like a mortal lock.

With the bangtails, of course, there are no cinches. Anything can happen in a horse race, and usually does.

What happened in the third that afternoon was this: my horse led all the way. With a hundred yards or so to go, he was in; he couldn't lose. I was on my way over to the mutual window when he started to falter, and I stood there and watched a black filly streak by him, to win by a nose.

I stood there with twenty dollars worth of worthless win tickets in my hand and a bad taste in my mouth. It was an uncertain game; Feather was right about that. Our working capital was down to the seven or eight dollars I had and the twenty-odd Whistler still owned.

Well, of course, I had the 1934 coupe with the re-capped tires and the noisy second gear. But I kind of wanted to keep that. It had served me well; it was loyal.

I went back to the stable, but Whistler wasn't there. Joey told me, "He went over to Bud's. He said you'd know where that was. He said he had some business with this Bud."

Humidity stamped the floor of his stall, and whinnied. I looked at him suspiciously, but there was no expression on his face outside of the lonely one. He was just an unhappy horse.

I found Whistler at the pool room, talking to Bud. This man called Bud didn't look like a man who would be, if you follow me. Nor did he look like the proprietor of a pool room. The clothes he wore were the clothes of a socially prominent banker, and the expression he usually wore with it was one of well-mannered, well-bred gentility. His dark hair was properly gray at the temples, and his thin nose properly aristocratic. He would have made an excellent front man.

His real name was Bainbridge Ulysses Devonshire, but he just used the initials, just the Bud. No one could blame him for that.

He and Whistler were conversing in very low, almost whispered, voices. When my boy speaks in a low voice, something's cooking.

I waited until they were finished, and Whistler came to join me at a corner booth. I said, "We're going to have to accept Sam Axer's offer. We're down to bedrock, junior."

He shook his head, his mouth tightly closed.

I said, "By the secrecy surrounding your conversation with Mr. Devonshire, I assume you've some better plan in mind. But you'll run out of

suckers, eventually, especially suckers who think they can play pool. You should be ashamed of yourself."

"It ain't pool," Whistler said. "You think I'm a moron, or something?"

"No," I said, "but you could be, with a little more schooling. If it isn't pool, what is it?"

"It's a deal," he said importantly. "We started on it yesterday, and everything's going good. You gotta be patient, Jeff. Don't rush me."

"I've already lost fifteen hundred dollars and my girl," I said. "Time is running out. How patient will I need to be?"

"Just a couple of days, that's all. Just until the fourth race, day after tomorrow."

"You—wouldn't want me to share this plan? You wouldn't want to tell me about it?"

The big head shook stubbornly. "You're too honest, Jeff. You make a business out of it." Then his big brows corrugated, and he looked like he looks when he's thinking. "What's this about Feather? That why you couldn't sleep last night?"

"Could be," I said.

He chewed his lower lip, and then his face brightened. "Don't you worry about it, buddy. I'll take care of that, too. I'll talk to her."

"No," I said. "Please, no. I've got trouble enough already."

He looked hurt. "You ain't got enough confidence in me, Jeff. You think I don't know what I'm doing?"

"To speak bluntly—no. But I could be wrong. I've been wrong before." I paused. "One question, please. Why the fourth, two days hence? And one more question. Where did you get the entry fee?"

"Because it's going to rain tomorrow. Because it's going to rain all day, and tomorrow night, too. Because the fourth is a claimer, and the track should be rough by then." He rose. "Well, I got to be breezing along. There's a matinee I wanta—"

I halted him with a hand. "One moment. About the entry fee—?"

"Why—ah—I—won a little more than I told you, the other night. I—"

"O.K.," I said. "You wouldn't want to tell me about the rain, now, would you? You're pretty sure about that, huh?"

"Sure." He looked at me blankly. "Why it says so, right in the paper." He shook his head. "Don't you read the papers?"

I expelled my breath slowly. I said quietly, "Not as carefully as I should. I guess I slipped up on that. You'll forgive me, Whistler?"

"Sure," he said generously. "We're buddies, ain't we? For better or for worse?"

"We are," I admitted.

For better or for worse. Things, I thought, could be a little better, but then we'd seen worse, much worse.



OUTSIDE, the sun was shining and it looked like it had no intentions of doing anything else, like hiding. But maybe, tomorrow . . .

It said so, in the paper, anyway.

In an hour, Feather would be through work for the day. I could pick her up, and we could go out and eat supper together on part of the seven dollars and sixty-three cents I now possessed. We could make it up, and make our plans for the bright future. We could ignore the dismal present. I had to have Feather; there was no living without Feather.

I killed some time, and then drove over there. I was still about ten minutes early, so I sat there, listening to my heart beat and thinking of nothing. Nothing but Feather, that is.

In ten minutes, she came out. She was wearing a powdery greenish linen sun-back dress and white shoes, no stockings. The man with her was wearing a loud, tannish sports jacket and cocoa-brown slacks and a fine panama hat. He, too, wore white shoes—buck.

The man with her was Sylvester Flayer III of the firm of Wright and Flayer, a young man with old eyes and the build of a good tackle.

Feather saw me, and then looked away. She looked up at Sylvester Flayer III and smiled, and they walked companionably down to his black-long convertible, parked at the curb.

He helped her in, and closed the door, and went around to his side and climbed in. The big motor snorted (at me?) and then the car went rolling down the street, looking expensive, even from behind.

You can't have everything, I thought. Only it wasn't everything I wanted; it was just Feather. To me, that's everything.

Well, not quite. I had Whistler and his mudder. I had Joey Lynch to worry about, and the sporting goods store that I could get, if I could round up two thousand this month. It was going to be difficult, parlaying seven dollars and sixty-three cents into that kind of lettuce. Even so, I still wouldn't have Feather.

Overhead, the sun continued to shine.

I drove over to the Derby Tap and had a small beer. I didn't want to start drinking, not in my present mood. It wouldn't help. Yesterday, I'd only been unhappy; it had seemed a temporary thing. But now . . .

I looked over a tip sheet. I listened to the talk around the Tap. But there was nothing hot. There was nothing I would put even seven dollars on, nothing I would put *fifty-three* cents on. (I spent a dime for the small beer.)

I had some clam chowder and coffee. I had a cigarette to go with my thoughts and the coffee. Whistler didn't show up; he had probably stayed to see the show a second time. He did that, if he liked the show. He liked most shows.

I went back to the two rooms and bath and sat around. I took a shower, and tried to read a story in a magazine, and smoked some more cigarettes. I went to the window, and opened it.

It was damp outside. From the east, came the rumble of thunder.

I was just turning in, when it started to rain. I was still awake when Whistler came home. He said, "I told you, Jeff."

"You told me," I admitted.

"Things are shaping up," he said.

I didn't ask him which things.

"What a picture," he said. "That Gene Autry—" He shook his head in wonder. "You think he's better'n Bing, Jeff? You think he's got a better voice?"

"I'm no judge," I said. "Good night, Whistler."

"Aw," he said, "don't be like that, Jeff. Don't worry. You don't need to worry about Joey, any more, Jeff."

I sat up in bed. "What happened to Joey?"

"Nothin'. What you worrying about? I talked him into joining the Army, that's all. He ain't got no folks, and they took him right away. They'll fatten him up. He reports for active duty next week."

"You think he'll like that?" I asked him. "Did you like it?"

"No. But it was different then, Jeff. This is the peacetime Army. And he ain't got no folks. He'll like it."

"Whistler," I said gravely, "be very careful, when you interfere in people's lives. It's dangerous business. It's not something you're equipped to handle."

"O.K., O.K. I thought it was for the best." He stopped, to stare at nothing. "I wonder if he believed that stuff about me being a major."

"He's not that young," I said, "or that dumb."

"Hey," my boy said belligerently, "you don't want to talk like that. That's rude, Jeff."

"I'm sorry," I said. "I beg your pardon."

"Sure," he said. "We're buddies, huh?"

"For better or for worse," I admitted.

It was still raining.

It was still raining next morning, and I convinced myself that it was the rain that had kept me awake most of the night. That and Whistler's snoring. Even when he snores, he whistles. But I knew, down where I can't fool myself, that it wasn't either of these that had kept me awake.

About noon, the sun came out. But only briefly. It clouded up after that again, and by night thunder was rumbling.

I didn't go to the track. I sat around the Derby listening to the gossip and feeling unhappy. The only gossip that interested me was about the fourth, tomorrow, and I didn't like the talk about that. Some of the boys claimed it was a boat race.

When I asked Whistler about it, his face was innocent. "It's news to me, Jeff. You don't think I'd have a piece of something like that, do you?"

He wouldn't, and I admitted it.

I studied the sheet. It was a two thousand dollar claiming race, for three year olds and older. It was a field of stiffs, generally, with two goats who looked like a sure thing for the place money. But if it was a boat race, it couldn't be figured at all, unless you were in on it. It looked like poison to me.



WHEN the thunder began to rumble that night, I was back at the apartment. Whistler was there, figuring a dope sheet in his laborious way, making a lot of pencil marks on clean paper.

He looked over at me, after a while. "This Humidity's got a chance—you know that, Jeff?"

"A chance for what? You mean to finish on his feet?"

"Well, no. To show, anyway. They're cheap horses, Jeff. They ain't got much."

"What's Humidity got?"

"A good boy on him. And he's a mudder, you know. I think I'll risk the twenty. You wouldn't care if I risked the twenty, Jeff?"

"What can we lose?" I said.

I slept a little better, this night. After two sleepless nights, I was tired enough to forget my troubles.

The morning was gloomy. The rain had stopped, but the clouds were still there, hiding the sun. It was a day to match my mood. It was a day to lay off the ponies, especially for a person who was as broke as I was.

By noon, the clouds were heavier, if anything, and the sun had not yet put in an appearance. The track would be in rotten shape. The form charts could go out the window.

Whistler and I went out to the track for the first race. It was a farce, a parody of a horse race. The time was laughable; the horses just about walked around.

The track got worse, with each race, but they were going to run out the card, nevertheless. When it came time for the fourth, we went over to give Joey a leg up. I told him, "Don't take any chances. This race isn't important enough for you to take any chances."

"Don't worry," Joey said. "I'll give him a good ride."

Humidity didn't say anything, surveying us all sadly.

I looked up at Joey, and smiled. "You going to like the Army, boy?"

He nodded. "My brother liked it, and he was only a corporal. He wasn't any major." He winked at me.

Then they were parading to the post, and Whistler and I went back to the fence to see what we could see. Whistler had already bought his tickets, he informed me, on Humidity.

Nine horses in this race, with Heartache and Jonathan the favorites, ranking about even. The rest of the field was a rough guess, with any of them likely to be a bad guess.

Jonathan had the pole, with our Humidity next to him. Heartache flanked Humidity.

It was a melee, right from the start. From the moment the webbing lifted, they were all fighting for the rail, and in that mob, anything could go. I saw Heartache crowding our boy over, and Joey's white face as he saw what was happening.

But the kid brought Humidity clear, through some miracle of his own, and our horse rode the two spot into the south turn, trailing Jonathan by half a length. It was then I remembered Jonathan was an Axer entry. If this was a boat race, it looked like Jonathan was the steed destined to cop. Because he was making time, in that mud.

The rest were still bunched; they were worse than bunched, they were snarled. It was a bad day to go around, and Heartache, the three horse, was keeping them all behind. Very well done, I thought. The officials couldn't prove a thing. It looked like an Axer purse.

They were going down the backstretch now, mud flying from those desperate hooves, the field bunched, and Humidity not losing a step to Jonathan.

The boy was giving him a ride.

Into the north, and here's where Jonathan went wide, dangerously wide toward the outer rail. The boy aboard him was fighting him, trying to bring him back.

Joey brought Humidity through and by—on the inner rail.

I was shouting, now. Humidity was leading them home. The boy on Jonathan took to the bat, and Jonathan responded, closing the gap. Slowly, but closing it just the same.

Not quite in time, though. It was Humidity, by a nose. He was still going, at the finish.

He was still going, into the turn, Joey trying to bring him around, when it happened.

I saw Joey go somersaulting over the nag's neck, and Humidity go crashing to his knees. Then he crumpled.

I started to run . . .

Joey was up, when I got there. But Humidity was still down. A steward said, "Broken foreleg," and looked at me. They would need my permission to shoot him, I thought.

But Whistler was there. Whistler said, "No. He belongs to Sam Axer. Axer claimed him." Whistler had a piece of paper in his hand, and I saw it was a certified check—for two thousand dollars.



BACK in the clubhouse restaurant, I got the story. I had to dig it out of him. Bud was his front. Bud had gone to Axer with his story. Bud had been a wealthy man whose daughter just had to have that horse Humidity.

"Axer plays it smart," Whistler said. "Bud says he'll pay twenty-five hundred, and Axer ain't going to admit, then, that he sold the nag. So he comes pussyfooting to me. No, I says. So he figures he'll claim him for two grand and peddle him to Bud for two and a half. Bud already put a hundred down on it, but there ain't anybody by the name he signed. Anyhow he says the horse has to be in sound condition."

"He's dead, now," I said.

"Yeh," he said. "That wasn't no part of our plan, though, Jeff." He looked at me pleadingly. "It's O.K., ain't it, Jeff? It ain't crooked?"

I considered this. "Not with Axer," I decided firmly.

Whistler spread out a fistful of the long and lovely green stuff.

"I couldn't figure the horse, Jeff. I put ten to place, ten to cop. We got to pay Bud the hundred out of this." He paused. "But we got the purse, and the two grand. You got that shop now, hey?"

"Check," I said.

Whistler was looking around. "I wonder

where she is. She promised to be here at three-thirty."

"Who?" I asked.

But then I saw her. In some white and silky, simple little thing, with a green scarf. She was walking straight towards us. She was smiling.

I got up, and she said, "Jeff. Jeff, honey. Whistler told me all about it. About the horse, and your not sleeping nights, and all your troubles, and—"

"You talk too much," I told her happily.

"Kiss me."

Which she did.

Then we sat down, and Whistler said, "I've got to go and talk to Joey. I'll be back." He was smirking.

Feather said, "He's so cute. I was so wrong about him, Jeff."

"Cute?" I said. "Well, maybe cunning—but cute?" I looked at her. "You should be working, shouldn't you? How about Wright and Flayer?"

"To hell," she said in her un-ladylike way, "with Wright and Flayer." Then she added, "Especially Flayer."

"Yes indeed," I said. "Those are my sentiments, exactly."

She covered my hand on the table. "Oh, Jeff—" she said. "Oh."

"Golly," I said, "yes."

Through the big windows of the restaurant, I could see the sun breaking through.





WHEELS IN THE



By
**VINCENT H.
GADDIS**

A Fact Story

DECORATION BY ROGER L. THOMAS

ON THE night of December 28, 1929, the British steamship *Talma* was sailing off the eastern shores of the Bay of Bengal. The weather was calm and clear. The deck lights gleamed soft in the darkness, and the only sounds were the lapping of waves against the sides of the vessel. Suddenly the captain, standing on the bridge, noticed what appeared to be flashes of lightning under the water. Startled, he began watching the phenomenon with increasing interest.

These flashes, the captain later reported, "rapidly formed into regular beams, curved as the curved spokes of a wheel might be, and of a width at the ship of about thirty feet. These revolved rapidly from right to left at the rate of two a second—timed as the beams passed the bridge—around a distant center, which could not actually be seen clearly, but appeared to be about five miles off.

"This center," the report continues, "passed ahead of the ship, being first observed on the port beam, and from there drawing slowly ahead of and across the bows of the ship, fading gradually till on the starboard bow, when the whole phenomenon disappeared about fifteen minutes after it began."

It is evident from the description of this mysterious occurrence that there was a large luminous wheel beneath the surface of the sea, and that light, shining upward from its submerged spokes, caused the appearance visible from the ship. Far more startling, however, is the fact that since 1750 shipping mast-

ers in the Indian Ocean and adjacent waters have been reporting these occurrences from time to time, while others have reported observing huge wheels rising above or entering the sea. Hundreds of these reports have been published in the *Marine Observer*, issued by the British Meteorological Office, since 1850.

In 1935 Charles Fitzhugh Talman, Chief Meteorologist of the U. S. Weather Bureau, issued a report on the mystery. He admitted that "these tales that come to us year after year from the Indian Ocean of luminous wonders as weird as anything Poe ever imagined" cannot be explained by modern science. "The whole business," he added, "is so astounding that one wonders why no scientific expedition has yet investigated it."

Nautical journals have discussed the enigma at various times, but very little information about these observations has reached the general public. Most significant is the localized nature of the reports. All of these occurrences have taken place in Oriental waters around and in the Indian Ocean with the exception of one near Vera Cruz, Mexico. This was the appearance of swiftly-moving lines of light of geometric formation seen on the deck of the I.M.S. *Bulldog* in April, 1875.

In a report to the Admiralty by Captain Evans, the hydrographer of the British Navy, are details of another wheel-like appearance. The commander of H.M.S. *Vulture*, while in the Persian Gulf in May, 1879, noticed luminous pulsations of light in the water mov-

ing at great speed. The waves of light passed under the ship, clearly showing an origin somewhere beneath the surface.

The report continues: "On looking toward the east, the appearance was that of a revolving wheel . . . whose spokes were illuminated, and, looking toward the west, a similar wheel seemed to be revolving, but in the opposite direction. These waves of light extended from the surface well under the water." The commander expressed the belief that there was only one wheel, and that the doubling was an illusion. The display lasted about twenty-five minutes. The light beams were about twenty-five feet wide; the space between the beams was about a hundred feet. Patches of oily-looking "spawn" were floating on the water.



EXACTLY a year later, in May, 1880, on a dark night, about 11:30 P.M., the British steamer *Patna*, while on a voyage up the Persian Gulf, suddenly noticed on each side of the vessel an enormous luminous wheel slowly revolving, the spokes of which seemed to brush the ship along. The spokes were about 300 yards long. Each wheel contained about sixteen spokes, and although the wheels were about 500 yards in diameter, the spokes could be observed all the way around. The captain of the vessel stated that the gleams seemed to glide along flat on the surface of the sea, no light being visible in the air above the water.

A month later, in June, 1880, the captain of the steamer *Shahjehan* reported that off the coast of Malabar he had seen "waves of brilliant light with spaces between." An oily substance was floating on the water, but, according to the officer, it was not causing the light, which was in the form of tremendous shafts. "As wave succeeded wave, one of the most brilliant, yet solemn, spectacles that one could think of, was here witnessed," he stated.

In October, 1891, a French astronomer reported the observation of "lances of light moving like the rays of a searchlight" in the China Sea. Then, early in the present century, there was another flurry of reports.

Captain Hoseason of the steamship *Kihwa*, in April, 1901, on the Persian Gulf, saw vast shafts of light suddenly appear. Shaft followed shaft, revolving at a speed of about sixty miles per hour. There was no phosphorescence in the water. The beams of light, seemingly projected from beneath the surface, had appeared suddenly, but died out gradually. The shafts were visible for about fifteen minutes. For some months the Royal Meteorological Society of England discussed the mystery in its official publication, but no conclusion could be reached.

Another report to the Royal Society in 1906 told of "a weird and most extraordinary display" seen in the Gulf of Oman. Beams of brilliant light swept across the ship's bows at a prodigious speed. They were coming from something below the surface, were about twenty feet apart and regularly spaced. A bucketful of water was examined under a microscope, but no phosphorescence was visible. The Gulf of Oman is at the entrance to the Persian Gulf.

Other reports followed. Shafts moving around a center, like a wheel, the spokes of which were about 300 yards long, were observed by the crew of the steamer *Delta* in Malacca Straits in March, 1907. They were plainly seen for half an hour, then disappeared suddenly. In the meantime the vessel had traveled about six miles.

The Danish steamship *Bintang*, sailing through the Straits of Malacca in June, 1909, noticed a huge wheel of light, flat upon the water, slowly revolving. This wheel was so large that only half of it could be seen, the center being far toward the horizon. It slowly moved forward toward the ship, the light becoming more dim and the speed of its rotation decreasing, until, when the center had almost reached the ship, it disappeared. It was visible for fifteen minutes.

In August, 1919, the Dutch steamer *Valentijn* was in the South China Sea when a "rotation of flashes" were observed. It was like a rapidly-turning horizontal wheel, visible above the water. The appearance of the phenomenon made a "somewhat uncomfortable impression" upon the crew.

Against this historical background which extends back to the year 1750, additional reports were filed during the years between the two great World Wars. Increasing interest in the problem was displayed in British scientific and nautical publications shortly before war came to the Pacific, and now that peace has come attempts to solve the strange enigma that lies behind these weird appearances may be expected.



IN ADDITION to these luminous wheels, there have been repeated reports of mysterious objects observed rising from and entering the sea. The Hydrographic Office at Washington, D. C., has in its files the report of the captain of the barque *Innerwich* on an observation he made in 1885 on the high seas between Yokohama and Victoria, B. C. It tells of a huge "fiery ball," visible in the sky, which descended and entered the sea. Its slow appearance indicates that it was not a meteorite.

In 1888 the *American Meteorological Journal* published the report of the British steamer *Siberian* which observed a huge red ball rising

from the sea near Cape Race. It rose to a height of about fifty feet, advanced toward the ship, then moved away against the wind and remained visible for about five minutes. Flammarion, the famous French scientist stated that the size of the ball was enormous.

Three luminous bodies were seen to issue from the sea in June, 1845, by observers on the brig *Victoria* when the vessel was about 900 miles east of Adalia, Asia Minor. They were described as about five times the size of the moon, with tail-like appendages, and were visible for ten minutes. In 1848 Sir W. Harris told the British Association of Science of two "rolling millstones of fire" which had whirled toward a vessel. A terrific crash had followed, leaving a strong sulphurous odor. The topmasts were broken into pieces.

In October, 1902, the steamer *Salisbury* came into New York harbor and reported the observation of a mysterious object in the South Atlantic. It had been noticed early in the evening, and the vessel had passed close to it. It was described as a huge, dark construction of some unknown sort, with a scaled back, bearing two lights, and slowly sinking. A motor or fins of some sort was making a commotion in the water. There was no sign of life aboard, and the object appeared "unearthly" to the sailors.

But the most amazing observation was reported by the captain of the barque *Lady of the Lake* to the Royal Meteorological Society in March, 1870. The ship was in the middle of the South Atlantic at the time. Suddenly, in the sky at a low level, moving against the wind, a huge wheeled construction came into view. It was of circular form and included a semi-circle divided into four equal parts, the central dividing shaft beginning at the center of the circle, extending far outward beyond the circular body, and then curving backward. It was of a solid construction and light gray in color, maintaining a steady speed against the wind.

It appeared from the southeast, moving from a point about twenty degrees above the horizon to a point about eighty degrees above. Then it changed its direction, and moved away toward the northeast, and was finally lost to view in the evening darkness. It was visible for half an hour, and stability of form was maintained.

These occurrences and reports present one of the most amazing and baffling mysteries facing modern science, and it is possible that the explanation, when it is found, will be as startling and incredible as the occurrences themselves. Who can say what lies behind these ocean-dwelling wheels?

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CHARLEY HOE HANDLE AND THE LOONY TROUT



ILLUSTRATED BY PETE KUHLMANN

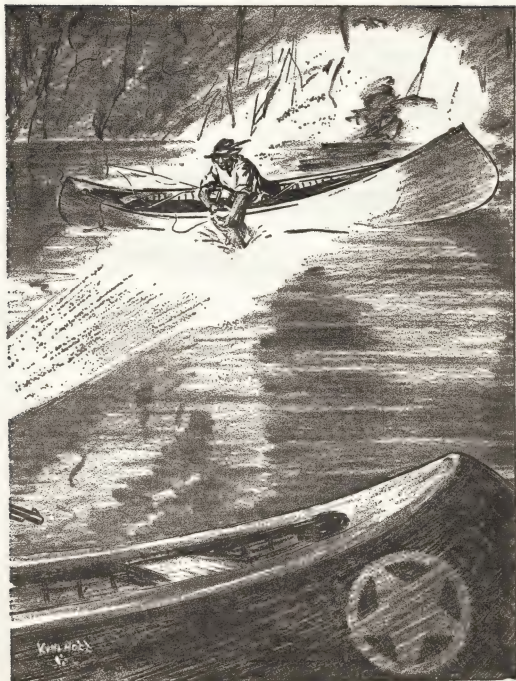
CHARLEY HOE Handle knewed that, when conditions was normal, there was no special harm in being caught out on Kitty Lake. But most of the time when Charley was out conditions wasn't normal.

Charley come to the lake on the afternoon of a spring day, pussyfootin' through the spruces as easy as though he was after a deer. In his hand was his fishin' rod, the little four-ounce beauty he had made hisself. In the back pocket of his blue jeans was a tobacco box full of flies, and in his denim shirt there was a leader. And there wasn't really no special need for pussyfootin' because the only thing Charley had in mind was goin' out on the lake to catch hisself some bluegills—which was a legal thing to do.

Just at that second a light flashed in his eyes and Horse Jenkins yelled, "Stay where you are!"



By JIM KJELGAARD



But Charley had went that way so many times when he had to that he had sort of conditioned himself to takin' things soft and easy all the time, and before he broke out of the last fringe of spruces he slunk behind one for a last look-see.

Kitty Lake lay before him, blue where it was deep and green where it wasn't. The big gray rocks that hemmed it in rose all around, and the water in the little bays that cut into those rocks lapped against them. Charley tapped his left forefinger against his nose and whistled through his teeth. There was just two ways anybody could get down to Kitty Lake. On this side was a hundred foot long stretch of beach, and on the other side—up the lake—was another stretch maybe a hundred and fifty feet long. The rest was all rock, gray rock from twenty to fifty feet high, and it was smooth as a tomato. There wasn't a foot-hold for a fly, and Charley knew those rocks couldn't be climbed because he had tried every way he knowed to climb them. Charley looked at the little, brushy ledge jutting out from one of the rocks. There was a loon's nest in that brush. But then, there was apt to be a loon's nest any place at all.

Charley went down to the lake, uncovered the little canoe he had hid there, and shoved off.

He paddled out to the center of the lake, and the canoe bobbed in the swell the breeze was kickin' up while Charley rigged his rod. He cast the spinner-fly he put on the leader, and it had hardly hit the water when a bluegill struck. Charley landed him and cast again. He caught another bluegill, and another, and another, until he had seven. It wasn't much fun, catching fish so fast and easy. But it was the way you got bluegills on Kitty Lake.

His fishing done—the limit was twenty-five but seven was all Charley wanted—he laid his rod down and thought about whatever an Injun thinks about when he's driftin' in a canoe on a lake. He saw one of the loons, over on the other side, come up and dive right down again to paddle underwater towards the brush on the ledge. Charley liked loons, and he grinned at this one while the canoe drifted over a patch of shallow water.

Then he almost fell into the lake.

A fluttering bug, too lazy to fly, drifted out of the air to light on the water. There was the barest ripple where the bug had been. Charley sat in the canoe, pop-eyed as an Injun can get, while he looked at the thing that had made the ripple. He had caught and fought rainbow trout in rivers, lakes, and streams. But, with all the rainbows he'd ever seen, he'd never even guessed that they growed that big. Charley feathered his paddle, drifting over the place where the trout had gone down. He peered into the shallow water, and if he'd been chewing tobacco then he would have swallowed it.

Laying on the bottom, that fish looked about twice as big as he had when he came to the top.

Charley let his canoe drift on. Kitty was a panfish lake, the law said. Whoever took a bass or trout out of it would answer to the law. Charley looked sad-like at his rod, and at the spruces all around. He could no more resist having a crack at that fish than he could help breathing. But rainbow trout bit at night, too. He'd wait. That, at the time, was not a bad idea.

Horse Jenkins, the warden whose life ambition it was to land Charley behind bars, was laying up on the bank looking through field glasses. Right now Horse was grinning. And he would have bet a hundred dollars against seven cents that Charley would be back on Kitty Lake that night.



WHEN Charley Hoe Handle came back to Kitty Lake he first sat for a long while beside his canoe. Nothing stirred. Nothing was heard. And it couldn't have been a better night for his purposes. The moon was hiding behind a bank of clouds, and the air was loaded with just a trace of wetness. After half an hour, making no noise and not so much as one ripple, Charley launched his canoe.

He knowed his rainbows, and was sure that this one was laying in that shallow water because he thought it was a good feeding place. Still quiet, using the senses that only an Injun has, Charley paddled out to the shallows and cast—he'd rigged his rod with a Coachman on the lead and a Rube Wood on the drag before he left his cabin.

Nothing happened. Charley cast again, giving his flies time to sink and working them along in the way rainbows like. Again nothing happened, nor did he get a raise for the next six casts. But that only made him sure that he had the big rainbow's private feeding ground—there wouldn't be any small fish hanging around that. Then, on his seventeenth cast, the lake exploded.

Charley struck to set the hook, and at once gave line. But, though it couldn't be saw in the dark, the grin on his face told what he thought of this kind of fishing. That big rainbow ploughed up the lake, and Charley let him go. He brought him back again and the fish started leaping. The splash he made when he came down sounded like a hundred pound beaver slapping the water with his tail. The hooked fish leaped again, and again, then went under. After a couple of minutes he started dancing in the air once more. Slowly Charley worked him into the canoe and got the gaff into him. He socked him with a lead fish billy and—

Just at that second a light flashed in his eyes and Horse Jenkins yelled, "Stay where you

are!" Charley didn't hesitate. His aim always had been good, and when he slung the fish billy there was the sound of breaking glass. Horse Jenkins' light went out.

A couple of shots ripped over the place where he had been.

But Charley wasn't there any more. The fish billy had no more than left his hand when he sent his paddle as deep as it would go and his canoe twenty feet to one side. But, even while he paddled, he mumbled all the Injun cuss words he could think of or invent on the spot. Horse Jenkins knew his way around, and the only two ways out of the lake would be blocked by some of his deputies. The rocks could not be climbed, and the best Charley could hope to do was dodge Horse for awhile and see if he could figure out something.

Charley brought his canoe to a stop so he could concentrate on adding plain and fancy variations to the cuss words he'd already used. Down at the end of the lake one of those fool loons, flushed out of its resting place, sent its wolfish, crazy laugh rolling over the water. Few loons were ever born so silly in the head that they'd go near either a canoe or a canoe-man, and Horse Jenkins sure knew that. Knowing it, his field of chase would be narrowed by two thirds. Charley Hoe Handle would be wherever the loon wasn't.

Charley turned and sent his canoe skidding along the big gray rocks that rose from the lake. He was caught, and he knew he was caught. Only—Charley went out in the center of the lake, and drifted while, not forty feet away, he heard Horse Jenkins paddle past. There was a heavy splash, and the sound of a dipping paddle as another canoe was launched.

The loon shrieked again, its mate answered. A light swept over the water, and Charley ducked as the beam missed him by a bare ten feet.

"Stay there!" Horse Jenkins yelled. "He ain't down where them loons are! I'll go herd him this way. And—" Horse Jenkins' most powerful language insulted the night while he described exactly what would happen to his deputies, "... if you let him get past!"

Charley turned silently and paddled back along the rocks.



THE FIRST rays of the rising sun woke Charley Hoe Handle the next morning. But he did not stir when he woke up because that might move some of the brush he had covered himself with. Besides, it was not at all bad to lie on this ledge where the loons had built their nest. He'd lain in worse places, and if a Injun could do nothing else he could always sleep some more.

Charley grinned to himself. Weighed down by rocks, his canoe lay six feet under Kitty Lake. Safely dressed, the big trout would keep in the icy waters until night. Charley grinned wider.

Last night, when Horse Jenkins had chased him into a little, footy bay where he could have been caught awful easy, he had thought sure he was a goner. Horse would have had only to follow him in—which was what he'd nearly done there in the pitch darkness when he'd been exploring every inch of the shore line—and Charley would have landed behind bars.

But there were times when it was a great help to know exactly how to imitate the cry of a loon.

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BREED

By

BILL ADAMS

YOU ask me to tell you a tale of the sea in the old days of sailing ships? That I can do. I'm a clipper ship sailor.

When I sailed on my third voyage I was a twenty-year-old apprentice, with two years at sea behind me. The ship had a fair crew, as crews went in the last days of the clippers. A mob of hard cases picked up from the waterfront slums—born tough, raised tough, ignorant men in whose lives there had never been any softness.

There was a Finn, a Greek, a swarthy Brazilian with a crooked scar from temple to chin point, a long-legged Jamaica Negro lean as a pike staff, a little Cockney, a skinny old gray-bearded Taffy with the asthma, and a whale of a big Liverpool Irishman. The rest I've forgotten. I was the only apprentice in the ship, and had it not been that the mate was a friendly man I would have had a lone time all to myself—apprentices not being allowed to mix with the foremast hands.

The mate was a cracking fine sailor, a single man who looked on a ship as something, and the best thing, to love. The second mate was



OF THE DEEP

all right, as second mates went; older than the mate, a bit soured because he'd never been able to pass for a first mate's ticket.

The skipper was new to the ship, and had been married a few months before. He came aboard after dark, with his woman, the night before we sailed. Yarning on the after hatch, near the gangway, the mate and I were unable to see either.

That skipper—he's got a name for being a driver, Bill. We'll make a fast voyage if the woman don't fetch us bad luck. A woman's out of place in a ship," said the mate, when they were gone into the cabin.

We saw the skipper when we pulled out next morning. A big fellow, round forty or so, neat as a new pin in a double-breasted blue serge suit, he looked a regular dandy—which wasn't at all the usual thing with sailing skippers.

"Funny what love'll do to a man, Bill," said the mate.

"Get sail on her as fast as you can, mister mate!" he ordered, and added, "I'm in a hurry to get to Frisco." Then he went into the chart-room and down to the cabin.

"In a hurry to get to Frisco, eh? The woman ain't done him much harm then. It suits me," said the mate.

The weather was rainy and chill with a light breeze. 'Twasn't till the second evening we saw any sky. The sun came out then, for a

little, just ere it set; the loom of the land faint on the horizon astern, sea and sky very peaceful; the last of the shore gulls, with beady eyes turned on us as they wheeled round the ship, seeming as though giving ship and crew their blessing ere they flew back to the shore cliffs.

"Funny the skipper didn't bring his woman on deck for a look around," said the mate, the sun gone, and dark falling over the murmurous sea.

"We're getting a good start, mister mate! I'm mighty glad of it," called the skipper, pacing the poop, his hands clasped behind him, his eyes taking in everything aloft and alow. Then he strode into the chartroom and down to the cabin.

"Who wouldn't be glad of a good start? What the devil does he have to talk so much for? I guess maybe he's one of the nervous kind. I never liked that kind," said the mate, sourly.

It breezed up next morning, with a thin drizzle. When the skipper came on deck the ship was booming along under full sail; and rolling plenty hard, as any ship will in a high following sea.

"I'll bet you dollars to doughnuts we beat

ILLUSTRATED BY
GORDON GRANT

her to Frisco by a good ten days, Bill!" said the mate, his eyes on a fine clipper we'd just finished signaling.

"Take the three skysails off her at once, mister mate! Don't lose any time about it! They should have been off long before this!" called the skipper, as he stepped from the chartroom.

"There's a Frisco-bound clipper on the quarter, sir. She's carrying full sail. I figured we could stand it if she could," said the mate, a bit dourly.

"Get those skysails off her at once! I can't have this rolling!" snapped the skipper, without so much as a glance at our rival.

"What's the idea of taking in sail just because of a little rolling, Bill?" grumbled the mate as we lowered the skysails.

Some of the hands were sneering about a skipper who'd shorten sail with a rival ship still carrying all she could swing. The Liverpool Irishman—O'Rourke his name was—was cursing a blue streak. Starting aloft to furl the mizzen skysail, the Cockney, looking down at the skipper sang out, "W're's yer bloomin' h'umbreller? Does yer mother know yer h'out?"

Eight bells struck as the hands came down from aloft. The second mate's watch came on deck; time for the mate's to go below.

"Mister mate, have all hands sweat up braces, sheets, and halyards!" ordered the skipper, and added, "That'll show 'em I take no impudence from my crew."

If you want to make a sailor sore keep him needlessly on deck when he's due to go below. It doesn't take two watches to tighten up a ship's gear.

"Wot does 'e think we h'are? A lot o' blitherin' slaves!" growled the Cockney.

"The skipper he must be a lass wearing trow-sers. Neffer did I like to sail with a lass in a ship," said the old Taffy in the slow drawl of a Welshman.

"I said, all hands sweat up the gear! Hop along there!" ordered the mate, his eyes on O'Rourke, whose face was black as thunder. For a moment they stared into each other's faces. Then O'Rourke spat a baccy chaw on the white planks of the poop deck and turned to the gear, and all hands followed him, to a man.

With the gear sweated up, the mate's watch went below. "By gravy, Bill, I never allowed a man to spit on the poop deck, but with a woman aboard I want no trouble if I can avoid it," said the mate, and called to the second to have the mess cleared up.

When the mate's watch returned to duty at noon the other ship was a white speck on the horizon ahead. It was blowing rather harder then when we went below, and right on our beam, so close that we could see her people

plainly, was a French full rigger with her skysails still set. The skipper wasn't in sight. The second said he'd been below the whole morning.

"That confounded Frog's going to run away from us, Bill! If only we had our skysails set it'd be the other way round," growled the mate.

"Why don't you set 'em, sir?" I asked. "No skipper's going to take a cussed foreigner leave him astern." He looked at me with a sort of hesitant expression in his eyes. "I neffer did like to sail with a lass wearing trow-sers," I drawled, and my shot went home.

"Come on!" he snapped, a bit red in the face, and ran down to the main deck with me at his heels, and quietly ordered the hands to hop aloft and loose the skysails and make no noise about it. We had them set in no time at all; and then, as the Frog began to fall astern, O'Rourke let out a wild cheer that brought the skipper on deck at the run. And as he stepped from the chart-house the first thing he saw was that baccy chaw on the spotless white planks of his poop. The second had forgotten about it!

"Mister mate, who's responsible for this?" he demanded, his eyes flashing, his fists clenched.

The mate looked at O'Rourke. O'Rourke looked at him. You could tell the big Irishman was thinking, "Now I wonder will he be split-tin' on me, or will he just be sayin' he don't know?"

"I asked you who was responsible for this disgusting mess, mister mate?" bellowed the skipper. If he'd been simmering before, he was boiling now. And you could see the struggle going on in the mate—him not wanting to get a good man in trouble.

And then up stepped O'Rourke, and said, cool as a cucumber, looking full in the skipper's furious face, "B'gob 'twas meself, sorr! An' if ye don't believe it here's anither o' the same." And just as he spat another chaw on the white poop deck a sharp squall struck the ship, and she dipped the length of her lee bulwark under the sea, and the skipper saw that the skysails were set.

"What's the meaning of this?" he stormed. "Get those—" Before he could say another word a woman's voice came from below—a sort of shriek it was. He swung instantly around and ran down to the cabin.

"What did I be telling you, Patrick O'Rourke? I thought a lass was sailing this ship," drawled the Taffy.

"Cut your talk, you old fool!" snapped the mate, and to O'Rourke said quietly, "You'll clean up that mess, my lad!"

"I will that, sorr! 'Tis a foin square man ye be!" grinned O'Rourke, and went for a bucket and broom.



RUNNING like a stag, the ship was leaving the Frog astern hand over hand. The mate looked at me, and I at him. "The skipper was going to say 'Get those skysails off her,' Bill," said he.

"He didn't say it, sir," said I.

"Ye're what they call a prevaricator," he grinned, and added, "It's queer. He don't look like a nervous kind."

"Maybe you'd best take the skysails off her, sir," I suggested.

"And have the hands calling me a lass in pants, eh?" he retorted.

And then the skipper reappeared, and, crimson with rage, shouted, "I ordered you to get those skysails off her! What's the meaning of this, mister?"

You could see how mad the mate was, but he said very calmly, "You let one of our own ships show us her heels, sir. Are you going to let a foreigner?"

"I don't allow my mates to question my orders. Go to your room, mister," replied the skipper in icy tones.

"Very good, sir," calmly answered the mate.

"Get the skysails off her, you men!" shouted the skipper, to the hands on the main deck below.

"Ye can get 'em off her yerself if ye want 'em off," cried O'Rourke. "We'll pull out our innards fere the mate any time. To the devil with you!"

"Twas beginning to really pipe now, and the ship was taking heavy sprays over her bulwarks. Astern the Frog was furling not only skysails, but royals too. Momentarily the sky was growing darker. A mast was liable to snap at any moment. And the skipper stared helplessly down at the hands, who stared back with grins on their careless faces.

And then the mate's calm face appeared at the open port of his room. "Hop along there, O'Rourke! Get those skysails in!" he called.

"Come on, me bullies!" yelled the big Irishman, and in no time at all they had the skysails stowed.

"That's good, lads! Now step lively and take in the royals!" shouted the skipper.

"Divil a rope will we touch till we have the mate on deck!" laughed O'Rourke.

"This is mutiny, you scoundrel! You'll pay for it!" stormed the skipper.

"'Tis yerself will be payin' fer bein' a fool. What o' yon lass in yer cabin?" retorted O'Rourke. And as he spoke, the first breath of a yet wilder squall struck the driving ship, and she leapt like a colt to the whip; her long decks deep in foaming white water.

"You, boy—go tell the mate to return to duty!" ordered the skipper, angry eyes on my face.

A twenty-year-old apprentice is nobody's "boy"! I felt like saying, "Go tell him yourself." But then I thought of the woman below, and of the ship I'd been two years in. She was my ship. To save them both I went and gave the mate the message.

"Get the royals off her, and any other sail you think fit," ordered the skipper when the mate appeared, and added, "I'm leaving it to your judgment, mister." He spoke in a queer sort of voice, as though a hard struggle were going on inside him. And then he turned and hurried below to the cabin.

"I can't figure him out, Bill. I guess love spoils the very best men," said the mate. The skipper didn't show up any more that day, nor during the night. The wind ceased a little ere dawn, and at daybreak we piled full sail on the ship. When we went off duty at eight bells a warm sun shone upon an empty sea, the Frog out of sight astern.

Returning to the deck at noon, we found one side of the poop walled off by canvas. "'Tis a private place he had me fix up for his woman. I got just a glimpse of her only—a slip of a lass with a long gown hiding all but her head and feet," the second told us, and added, "I heard her ask him, 'Do you think we'll for sure be in San Francisco in four months, darling?' And he answers her, 'Dear God, I hope so, my pet.' An' then I heard 'em kissing."

"'Tis the woman's in a great stew to get to Frisco, Bill," said the mate. "The skipper's scared to drive the ship because of scaring her, and scared not to drive the ship lest she be disappointed about getting to Frisco. Well, he's as good as turned the ship over to me, and now I see the reason. By all the fiddles in Fiddler's Green I'm going to drive her!"



BUT from that morning there was no driving. Day on day we had but little breezes, and often no more than an air. The skipper was nervous as a cat on a hot stove-lid. He'd pace to and fro, whistling for a wind for an hour at a time. One day he called the Finn, and said, "You, Finn! You fellows know how to fetch a ship wind. For heaven's sake go to it!" So the Finn, after the way Finns have, stuck his sheath knife in the mizzen lowermast, and, his eyes on the shining blade, whistled soft and low.

A weird eerie tune it was, enough to give you the creeps. All through the forenoon watch he kept it up, but no wind came. So then the skipper called O'Rourke. "You, Irishman! What good are you in a ship? Can't you fetch us a breeze?" And O'Rourke went aloft to the fore skysail masthead, and clung there all through the afternoon watch; a hundred and eighty feet above the bright blue water; and he whistled like it might have been all

the fairies in green Killarney whistling, so pleading and plaintive his tune was. But no wind came. So the skipper said to that long-legged skinny Negro from Jamaica, standing statue-still with idle hands upon the idle wheel, "You, black fellow! Can't you fetch us a breeze?"

And the negro brought from his dungaree pants' pocket a rabbit's foot, and tied it to the wheel's midship spoke. "We goin' to git us a bully breeze for shuah now, sar! Ten year I bin wear dat rabbit foot an' he never go back on me yet, sar!" said he, grinning from ear to ear.

But after he'd stood there through a full four hour watch, which is twice a helmsman's usual time, the skipper grumbled, "Take that confounded rabbit foot off the wheel, and get out of here!" And as the Negro walked sorrowfully away the Cockney came up to the poop and offered to curse for a breeze. A terror he was at cursing; and boasted to be known as such from London's east Indie dock road to the Boca at Buenos Aires, the Frisco sea wall, and the godowns at Poochow.

The skipper was just going to tell him to go ahead and curse—though one could see plain enough 'twas not much to his liking—when along came that swarthy ink-eyed Brazilian and shoved the Cockney aside. "Señor Capitaine, I will breeng us a fine wind!" said he, speaking very softly, his eyes on the skipper's troubled face. The skipper smiled an eager smile and told him to go to it. So the Brazilian opened his scarlet shirt, and brought from round his chocolate-colored neck a rosary, and knelt down in the bright full moonlight on the spotless white planks of the poop deck and said one *Hail Mary* after another, on and on and on, till the first streak of gray dawn came stealing over the motionless blue sea.

A beautiful rosary it was, of pearls on a chain of gold, and had hung around the neck of a holy saint close to the candle-lit golden altar in the great cathedral at Rio—until the fellow stole it one day during carnival time when no one was about. With the rosary round its owners neck again, the last stars fading, the full moon a sad-looking round white orb in a sky turning from dark indigo to brilliant blue, the skipper walked gloomily forward to the men's forecabin. And there sat Popokopolos, the Greek, at work on a ship model. It was all but finished and a grand job. All that was left was the fitting of the mainsail. 'Twas the model of a full-rigged ship, and so like the ship herself that, but for size, it might have been her twin sister.

The skipper's face lit up, the instant he saw it. "I believe you've got it, Popokopolos!" he cried. "There's nothing like a good ship model to fetch a ship wind! Specially to the ship

she's a model of! Get that sail fitted as soon as you can, my lad! Then set her on the main hatch, and blow good and hard in her sails. When you give out have someone with plenty of wind relieve you."

So, just as eight bells struck, eight o'clock of a blazing hot morning, Popokopolos set his model on the hatch and began to blow into her sails. On and on he blew till there was no more wind in his windpipes. Then, before any of her sails could droop, O'Rourke, who had more wind in him than any man aboard, took his place. And O'Rourke kept blowing, on and on and on, till dusk fell and the bright blue sea faded to darkness, and the brilliant blue sky changed once again to dark indigo, till the great yellow orb of the full moon rose to change that indigo sky to a silvery blue sky.

But still no wind came. And then, as Popokopolos was about to carry his model back to the forecabin, and at the very instant that the Cockney was about to start cursing—and that without the skipper's permission—the voice of the gray-bearded old Taffy came from the shadow of the deck house. "Might be it is I who will bring us luck and a good wind by sparing some of my own scarce wind," he drawled.

All hands made way for him, and he sat down cross-legged like the Phwelli tailor—Phwelli being pronounced Thwelly, as maybe you know, and a small fishing village on the Welsh coast—and blew the best he could. And suddenly a shout went up, and the skipper laughed out loud; for at long last had come a sound as of a block creaking somewhere in the rigging—and that happens only when wind's in the sails. But next moment all were glummer than before, because the little Taffy said sadly, and very apologetically, "I am sorry, shipmates. It was only the noise of my asthma in my windpipes."

The Cockney called to the skipper, "Now it's my turn, Cap'n, an' 'ere I goes a'cursin'!" But before he could start a first curse the skipper cried very sternly, "No. I can have none of that. My wife would never permit it." And as he walked slowly away to the cabin the second mate told the old Taffy to get to blazes out of it, and the Taffy crept off to his bunk muttering, "Neffer did I like to sail with a lass in a ship." And all hands felt just as he did about that.

So it was all through the northern tropic, and when at last thanks to an occasional vagrant air, we crept into the region of the doldrums it was worse yet. The sea level as a lady's mirror, sun blazing overhead, pitch bubbling up between the deck planks. And when at last, by grace of a doldrum squall with rain in torrents, we came out to the region of the southeast trade winds, what wind

we found was from dead ahead; and not much of it at that.

And not once, by day or moonlit night, had any man save the second mate had so much as a glimpse of the woman responsible for it all. We'd hear her and the skipper talking now and then, behind the canvas partition, in tones too low for us to catch their words. Now and then we'd hear her crying softly. "By the glimpse I had of her, I'd say she was no more'n a girl," said the second mate.

"Girl or old hag, the devil's in her. We'll never see port again," grunted the mate.



AT LONG last we came down off the River Plate coast, which the lubbers call Rio de la Plata. And there a fine strong wind blew; but from dead ahead, so that continually we must be tacking ship. Tacking's heavy work. Dried out by the heat of the tropics we all were; not a drop of sweat left in us. Lean as pike staffs, we shivered to the beat of that cold wind from the south. Ninety days we'd been at sea, and with any luck should have been long ago past the Horn.

'Twas on the third day of tacking ship we heard the woman's voice. "You promised we'd be in San Francisco in four months, darling! Oh, what art I going to do?" And then we heard her sobbing. And so pitiful it sounded that there was no man but looked a bit shamefaced.

'Twas a bit later the skipper came to the mate; and if ever man looked sore troubled he was that man. "The wind's fair for Montevideo, mister, and my wife wants me to put in there," he said. "But if I do we'll have to lie there a full month. If it was a month later I'd agree. The owner would understand, I'm sure. But if I put in and lie there a month I'll lose my job and never be able to get another command."

"I don't know what's it all about; but I never heard of a ship being sailed by a woman's whim, if you'll excuse my saying so, sir," replied the mate.

And then O'Rourke, at the wheel nearby, cried, "B'gob, sorr, beggin' yer pardon, w'y don't ye flip a coin to tell ye which way to go—Frisco or Monte?"

Neither knowing what to think of that, skipper and mate looked doubtfully at one another. So I brought from the pocket of my dungaree pants an old dollar I'd been packing for a year or so. I had no wish to go to Monte. Frisco's the finest port on all the seas. My dollar had done me more than one good turn. Perhaps 'twould do me one now. "I've a dollar if you'd like to toss, sir," said I.

"I never knew an apprentice to have money at sea. They blow it before they sail. Perhaps it's a good omen," said the skipper.

"It looks that way to me, sir," the mate agreed.

"Tails it's the Horn and Frisco. Heads it's Monte," said the skipper.

"Tails it is, sir," said I, picking up my dollar that was tails on both sides. And I'd but spoken when the wind hauled, and came fresh from nor'east.

"Check in the yards and drive her!" cried the skipper; then added dolefully, "What to say to my poor wife I don't know."

The ship ran like a stag till we came past the corner of Staten Land, ninety-eight miles nor'east the Horn. Then, as we came out from under the lee of the land, the norther died and we lay uneasily rolling on a tumbling black sea with a dark sky low over the mastheads. Ahead we could see snow driving, and a wild sea running. "We'll catch hell in a few minutes, Bill," said the mate, and shouted, "All hands shorten sail!"

We stripped her down to three lower topsails, and soon she was wallowing in seas eighty foot high; her deck awash, snow whirling, a savage wind from due west dead in her teeth.

Three full weeks we fought that brutal gale, gaining never a foot to the westward. From the second day no man had a dry rag left. No man but had the thick skin on his palms cracked wide at every finger joint by cruel cold, and at his neck and wrists, wherever frozen oilskin rubbed his sorry hide, salt water boils.

The woman stayed below now; the canvas partition taken down long since. We gave no thought to her. Man against the sea this was, and all men fought as any man must fight when life's at stake. Only the little Taffy couldn't fight. Day after day he lay in his bunk, with head and shoulders propped to ease his breathing. And all the time he knitted, making a little hammock out of strong white roping twine to pass the time away. We'd see his lips move as he wheezed and knitted, and know that he was muttering, "Neffers did I like to sail with a lass in a ship."

"Why in all hell did ye not stay home in Thwelly, knittin' fishin' nets? Yer but an imitation man' knittin' a silly toy," grumbled O'Rourke one roaring bitter day.

That day, three weeks of battle done, the wind came wilder yet. Full hurricane force, it was. Sprays striking on the reeling rigging froze. From long submersion green slime, ice slippery, was thick upon the decks. You could not pass along them unless you gripped a lifeline. We'd see the ghost-faced skipper now and then, staring from hopeless eyes into the weather. "Curse you and your blasted dollar, Bill!" the wan mate growled. I flung my dollar to the barbarous black sea.

It was not possible to pump fresh water

now. The pump well in the fiferail by the mizenmast was kept tight closed by a snug wooden plug. Two days went by, without a drop of water for the cook. No coffee, nor pea soup, nor boiled salt pork. We nibbled hardtack only.

A third demoniac morning broke. The skipper beckoned to the mate, and yelled into his ear. I caught two words. *Fresh water*. One hand upon the rod-tight lifeline, the mate threw his free arm about my neck and drew my head against his mouth and shouted, "Get O'Rourke! Tell him to bring a bucket!"

Between the onrush of great boarding seas we pulled the wooden plug out, and pushed the pump rod down into the well and coupled it. And then O'Rourke, straddling the foot-wide rail with his strong thighs took from above his neck the ragged towel he'd tucked there for a muffler, and jammed it around the rod to keep the sea from getting down to the fresh water tank. The mate gripped the pump handle. I held the wooden bucket neath the spout, and had it all but full when a salt cataract came thundering aboard and all but tore it from my freezing fingers. Eight times I lost a bucket of fresh water. Half drowned, the mate and I were. But O'Rourke, because he had to stay there, straddled on the rail, and could not ever leap into the rigging for a breathing space as could the mate and I, was in worse fix than we. We'd hear him curse, half catch his bellowed oath. But once I saw a grin on his big face, and knew that he was thinking, "Coffee b'gob, an' pipin' hot pea soup!"

At last I had a bucket of fresh water. The wind had lulled for just a moment's space. The ship rose partially erect.

And then the mate cried, "Take that bucket to the skipper quick. And that will do you, O'Rourke!" While I made haste to carry out the order ere the wind came back, he pulled the pump rod out and drove the plug in.

I had the time, and only just the time, to reach the cabin door and hand my bucket to the skipper waiting there ere back the fierce wind came in its full fury. And then I joined the mate, upon the poop. O'Rourke was there, his grim eyes murderous. "Fresh water for the skipper's woman, but devil a drop fer us!" he bellowed. His savage tones rang clear, above the savage wind.

With veary yet forever watchful eyes upon the straining masts, the mate shrugged weary shoulders. And forward went O'Rourke, a dismal figure on the dismal deck; and scarce had he disappeared into the forecabin when, after the sometimes manner of those cruel Horn gales, the wind fell to a little sou'wester breeze. Snow ceased. The tired ship rose up. A little gleam came in the dreary sky.

"We'll set the upper topsails, Bill, and give

her the foresail too. Wind's coming from the south, or I'm a Dutchie!" cried the mate, and shouting for the hands, leapt down to the main deck.

And on our beam, closeby, one ship to either side, I saw that clipper that had passed us long ago, and the Frog ship.

The hands came streaming out, and cursed the mate, and told him he could go to hell for all they cared. They'd pump fresh water first. The sails could wait.

"D'ye want them ships to leave us? The luck has turned at last! Show me some sailors now!" he cried. They only cursed him louder.

And then we heard the skipper at the chart-house door calling, "Come aft all hands!"

"Aye, we'll come aft, ye swine!" bellowed O'Rourke, and ran toward the poop with all hands after him.

"My God, they'll murder him! Come on, Bill, quick!" the mate cried, and snatched a belaying pin from the pin rail, and ran, and I ran after him.

"Steady lads! Steady now!" we heard the skipper say. His face was wreathed in smiles. He looked as cheery as a lad to whom at Christmas old Santa Claus has brought the longed-for toy.



O'ROURKE stopped in his tracks, puzzled because the skipper's words had such a friendly ring and puzzled by his bright face. And every man stopped as the

leader stopped.

"I want you all to come down to the saloon, my lads. Come on. I'll lead the way," the skipper said, and turned into the chart-house.

"Wot is it, Cap'n? Does we get a swig o' rum?" the Cockney called.

Turning, the skipper laughed. "Aye, you can have some rum! I hadn't thought of that. We'll have a tot of rum, and then set sail. How will that be?" he answered.

"Rum first, an' then fresh water fer the cook an' after that the sails!" cried the Cockney.

"I'd like to beat those two fast packets to Frisco, lads," said the skipper, looking toward the two ships setting sail.

"Yer let 'em leave us once, so wot's the 'urry now?" sneered the Cockney. "Come on an' let's taste rum, then get fresh water an' after that the sails!" A chorus of "aye, aye" came from the others.

"Give us our rum afore we helps ourselves!" threatened the Irishman.

"Come on below, and get your rum, and welcome," replied the skipper, smiling.

So down they went, all following O'Rourke close at the skipper's heels; the mate, and second, and myself close after them.

And there they stood, the mob of them, in

the warm dry saloon, and stared amazedly, and no man spoke.

"Well, what d'ye think of your new skipper, lads?" the skipper asked, proud eyes upon his oilskinned motley mob.

And then the woman, who was but a lass, lying on the settee close to the little bogey stove where warm coals glowed, seeing them all so silent and abashed, said to O'Rourke, her shining eyes smiling into his face, "Would you like to hold him, sailor?"

"Me first, ma'am!" cried the Cockney, but O'Rourke pushed him back.

"I'll lay him on a pillow, dearest. The men's hands are too cold," the skipper said.

And O'Rourke took the pillow from the skipper's hands, with him upon it. Pink as a rosebud he was, and naked as the day—a tiny fragile thing the like of which no man of them ever had seen before. And, as O'Rourke stood staring down at him, he clenched a little fist, and, waving his incredibly small arm, struck the great Irishman on the end of his nose—so that all that mob of hard cases gasped, and looked from one to another with delighted astonishment.

"H'it's my turn now. H'I want's 'im ter 'it me, too!" pleaded the Cockney.

"Will I let him hold yer boy, lady?" queried O'Rourke.

"Why, of course. You can all hold him, if you want to," she answered.

"It me, little Skipper! 'Tis me as 'ard as yer like!" urged the Cockney, taking the pillow from O'Rourke. And then he whispered, "Blimey! Look at that, will yer? 'E's a'goin' ter sleep!"

And then the skipper bade the steward bring rum for all hands. "Hold on, lad! Your rum'll be here right away!" he called, seeing the Brazilian slipping out to the quarterdeck. But the Brazilian said he'd be back in a minute, and the Greek and Negro followed him. When they returned the new skipper was asleep on his mother's breast; none other having dared hold him, lest they waken him. And O'Rourke, as they entered, said low-voiced, his eyes on a bucket of water beside the bogey stove, "Cap'n, we didn't know ye wanted yon water for to give the new skipper a bath."

And the Brazilian stepped up to the woman lying on the settee, and said shyly, "Lady, this I brought for a little gift for your son," and laid in her delicate hand his rosary of gold and pearl. Before she could find words to thank him, the long skinny Jamaica Negro laid in her hand his rabbit foot, saying, "Now for sure lady, dat lil' boy he always gits luck. I give him my ol' rabbit foot for hisself." And, as the Negro stepped back, the Greek knelt down and, holding out the beautiful ship model on which he had worked in all

his spare time through the dog watches of three long voyages, said softly, "I have bring your boy a little ship to play weez w'en 'e ees older, lady."

Unable to find any words, the woman looked up at the skipper, and, looking from one to another of his motley mob, he said, a bit red in the face, "God bless you all! I guess we don't any of us knew very much about God, but maybe it'll be all right." And, as every man there took off his sou'wester, he added, "You'd better swig down your rum now, lads. Then you can pump all the fresh water you like, and after that we'll get some sail on the ship."

"To the devil wi' fresh water!" exclaimed O'Rourke, and, lifting his mug to his lips, said, "Here's bully breezes to the new skipper!" And all hands gulped down their rum and ran silently out to the deck, and went to shouting and yelling and cheering as they piled the upper topsails on the ship and sheeted home her big foresail.

Pointing south as the last rope was coiled, the mate said, "See what's coming, Bill? Inside five minutes we'll have a southerly buster. It's going to blow like billybedam, and there'll be a whale of a high following sea. Them southerly busters always last three days, and she'll be rolling her railings under. I wonder how the new skipper'll make out!" He'd scarce spoken when out of the forecabin came the little old Taffy. With the damp west wind gone quite away and a clear crisp wind from south coming, his wheezing had quit; and, his fine fancy little hammock of white roping twine held in his hand, he hurried back to the cabin.

"Come in, my man, and get your rum! I ought to have thought to send it to you," said the skipper, but the Taffy stepped right past him. With the woman watching him curiously, and the skipper wondering what he might be up to, he made the hammock fast between two stanchions. Then, turning to the woman, he said, "The little lad, he will sleep sound in the hammock, lady, and neffer will know the ship is rolling." And he stooped and took from her the pillow with the new skipper upon it, and laid it and him in the hammock. She stretched out a hand to him, and he took the tips of her delicate fingers in his rough tarry fingers, and kissed them, and said, "You haff brought us all good luck, lady! May God be with you!"

Before the Taffy was back in the forecabin, the buster caught us. For three days it blew like all glory. It drove us into a strong south-east trade wind which took us well north of the line, where we picked up a bully north-east trade that carried us the rest of the way to Frisco. Not till we had been ten days at our moorings did that fine fast clipper arrive, and the Frog ship came in two days later.



THE HODAG AND MOOSE MILK O'BRIEN

FOLKS who call the hodag a mythical animal just don't know what they're talking about, according to Moose Milk O'Brien.

He's willing to concede that the gum-beroo, the skreestacker and the sidehill gouger, which is said to have legs shorter on the right than on the left for greater ease in running around mountains, may be inventions of north-west lumbercamp raconteurs for the benefit of green easterners. A hodag, though, he's not only seen but fought with. He'll show you the scars on his body any time you want to see them.

And he never went back to the woods after that experience. It just wouldn't be right, he says. With all those people wanting to see a hodag too, if he ever tried going back some damn fool would be sure to follow him. "I just won't take the responsibility," Moose Milk says.

He's satisfied now to live on that chicken ranch he runs with his wife, Fern, over near Mukilteo. Time was, though, when it didn't look as if anything would make Moose Milk settle down. He liked to roam the woods of the Olympic Peninsula, and he never spent any more time in towns that he had to. To buy his beans, bacon and such other meager supplies as he needed, he trapped animals which he sold to zoos all over the country.

It's funny how some women are always trying to tie a man like that down. Maybe it's a challenge to them. Moose Milk wasn't what you'd call exactly handsome, either. He wasn't a big man, but he was wiry and tough and had bright red hair with a mustache to match. He was

bad-tempered, too—due to his stomach ulcer, he said, a condition he'd had for years. He had no use for women. "Let them get their hooks into you, and you never get out of a house again," he always said. He went where he pleased, maybe spending a week or two with the Indians either at La Push or Quinault, and the next thing you knew he'd be all by himself up around the headwaters of the Queets, on the trail of some bear or cougar he was chasing. He seemed afraid of nothing. He never went armed with more than a twelve-gauge shotgun, which couldn't have been much protection against his kind of game. There was never mark of either shot or trap on any of the animals he brought to Port Angeles to ship down to Seattle. He'd never explain his methods, though. Not even the Indians knew why he was so successful as a hunter. Probably it was because he knew the wild life of the peninsula better than anyone. "You gotta put yourself in the animal's place and outsmart 'im." is all he'd ever say.

By HECTOR CHEVIGNY



How long the battle raged, Moose Milk could never recall—maybe an hour, maybe two. Twice he got away and twice the beast brought him down again.

ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE WERT



MOOSE MILK would time his infrequent trips into Port Angeles with the need to treat his stomach ulcer. His method of treating an ulcer of the stomach was peculiar to him and the thing that gave rise to his nickname. A doctor he once saw about it advised milk. But most of the other authorities he consulted recommended rye whiskey; about all you could do for an ulcer, they said, was kill the pain, and for that there's nothing like rye. So he figured to satisfy both schools, and his treatment consisted of sitting in The Elite in Port Angeles for a week or two at a stretch, while he went on a diet of rye whiskey and condensed milk, half and half. In the northwest country, this pleasant beverage is known as moose milk. Fern Peterson, who ran The Elite, always kept a case of condensed milk under the bar against his coming. When he figured he'd nursed himself sufficiently back to health, he'd light out for the woods again, not to be seen for two or three months more.

Fern had been trying for a long time to tie Moose Milk down. She wasn't a young woman, but she was handsome—big, with hair like taffy and eyes the color of new cut ice. She ran a neat, clean place, too, and her customers observed the utmost decorum at all times. There were several lumberjacks and at least one logging superintendent who would have been very glad to help her settle on that chicken ranch she yearned for—especially with her bank account—but she just couldn't seem to forget Moose Milk O'Brien. All that he would ever say to her along that line was, "You and your chickens." It looked like a pretty forlorn hope for Fern.

On the day that everything happened, Moose Milk came into Port Angeles to ship a bobcat he'd captured. He had it sitting beside him on the front seat of the old truck he used to come into town in. As usual, a crowd gathered to watch the way he handled the animal, among them a number of sailors off a whaler that happened to be tied up at the wharves. It was a particularly fine specimen of bobcat, as big as a bull dog and about as thick set, with long pointed ears and the most evil pair of topaz eyes you ever saw. Moose Milk just said, "Come on, git outa there, Luke," and jerked the cat off the truck by the leash around its neck. At first it trotted quietly alongside Moose Milk as he headed for the docks, then somebody in the crowd yelled at it. That almost started things. The animal emitted a piercing screech, like a buzz saw hitting a rusty spike in a log, and leaped for freedom. Moose Milk, though, was unconcerned. A tug at the leash brought the fractious animal back to earth with a double somersault.

"Now, Luke, behave yourself," he said. The animal quieted right down and when they got

to the crate sitting on the dock, it just jumped in when Moose Milk told it to.

It was late, around seven, before Moose Milk finished his business at the docks—he could neither read nor write, his papers had to be made out for him—and could get over to The Elite to start treating his ulcer. It had been giving him a good deal of trouble of late, and he figured to spend at least a week nursing it. The place was full when he came in. Twenty or thirty lumberjacks were up against the bar, and about as many sailors off that whaler in port were at the tables or feeding nickels to the automatic piano. That number of jacks and sailors together is kind of an explosive mixture, ordinarily, but Axel Olsen, Fern's bartender and swamper, was keeping his bungstarter close at hand and the usual decorum was being observed. Moose Milk just said hello all around, then sat at a table by himself, knowing Fern would fix what he needed when she had the time.

Soon it was noticed that Fern was taking her time about coming over even to say hello. She stayed where she was, sitting and talking to the first mate of the whaler—a big, good-looking man with a gift of gab and also with red hair—named Harry Slater. She'd been spending a good deal of time with this Slater since his ship came into port. That was unusual for Fern who, though she liked to chat with her customers, seldom played favorites. It was the fascination of his mind, she explained later. He was one of those men who've been everywhere, seen everything, and don't mind talking about it. He could discourse freely and at length on any subject that came to hand—the marriage customs of the Hindus, the quality of the vodka at New Archangel, what to do for a sty on the eye, how to revive the life in a rheumatism belt, and the reasons why he thought Finnish girls the most beautiful in the world.



MOOSE MILK sat, drumming on the table. Fern's ignoring him seemed kind of pointed. Finally he got up and tapped her on the shoulder. "How 'bout givin' me my medicine?" he said.

Fern acted surprised, as if she hadn't known all along he was there, and introduced the two men. Slater's voice had a touch of cockney. "Ah, yes, the mighty nimrod who brought that beast down to the docks this afternoon," he said, shaking hands heartily. Moose Milk sat down but he didn't thaw out right away—not until the conversation turned to stomach ulcers. It came out that Slater used to have one too—bothered him for years, he said. Moose Milk wanted to know how he'd cured it. Slater pointed to the glass of clear liquid in front of him and said, "With the sovereign remedy of all thinking men from Singapore to London—gin

and bitters." And he offered to set them up if Moose Milk cared to try it. If he'd known what a liar the man was, Moose Milk said later, he never would have touched the stuff. The second glass he explains by saying the first had tasted so bad he figured it had to be good for you to make people drink it. He denies the third and fourth.

Probably everything would have been all right, though, if that fellow Slater hadn't got started on the subject of peculiar animals he claimed to have seen with his own eyes all over the world. It was disgusting, Moose Milk said later, to see how Fern hung on to every word he said, though it didn't take over five minutes of listening to him to know he was just insulting your intelligence. Slater said, for instance, that down in South Africa there's something like an antelope, called the hartebeest, that teaches its young to do circus tricks. With his own eyes, he claimed, he'd seen the female hartebeest teaching her foal to jump through a hoop.

That was only a starter. "He was just like all them fellows who think because you don't crack a smile you're believin' 'em, and so they keep pilin' it on." Slater told of seeing the peccary, the aardvark and the quagga. There was the okapi which has never been known to take a drink of water, the duck-billed platypus, which not only lays eggs but suckles its young, the wallaby which carries a pouch like the one in a man's pants pockets, the dugong, which Slater swore has breasts like a woman. And then there was the giraffe.

When he got to talking about that animal with a neck seventeen feet long—so it could get to the tree tops of which it was very fond—he'd had enough, Moose Milk said later. He broke into what Slater was saying to ask if, in all his travels, he'd ever seen an animal like the gumbeeroo. Fern happened to be away from the table when Moose Milk put this question to Slater, but quite a crowd of lumberjacks with their drinks in their hands had sat down and were listening. Their faces never moved a muscle. If Fern had been there, though, she might have gotten mad at Moose Milk starting to needle Slater the way they do to green easterners around the lumbercamps.

"Well, sir, I'm not surprised you never heard of the gumbeeroo," Moose Milk said when Slater admitted it was a new one on him. "It's a pretty rare animal. Runs around twenty pounds in weight and has black fur. It causes all them explosions you heard when there's forest fires. That's because it has inflammable blood."

Slater looked at Moose Milk, sort of hard, but one of the jacks spoke up and with a face as straight as Moose Milk's said, "Nobody knows the animals in these parts like Mr. O'Brien." And the others all nodded. The room got suddenly kind of quiet. There was just that elec-

tric piano in back where the sailors kept feeding it nickels.

"Yessir, the world's rarest animals are right here on the Olympic Peninsula. You'll find them all within a mile of here." And he told about the skreestacker, that little bird which builds snow white nests out of wisps of fog. He also described at length the habits of the tree-twist, the agropelter, the glacial frog—that's the only fur-bearing frog in existence—and the flu-flu bird. When Moose Milk got to the flu-flu bird, Slater started getting really suspicious. "Why should the flu-flu bird never fly any way but backwards?"

"The usual explanation," Moose Milk told him, "is that the bird isn't interested in seeing where it's going but only in lookin' at where it's been. But I'm here to tell you that ain't the reason," he added. "It flies that way because it's got its wings on backwards."



IF SLATER hadn't laughed, Moose Milk said later, he might have quit kidding him about then. He probably wouldn't have gone so far as to tell him about the hodag. Nobody laughed when Slater was lying. Giraffes! That laugh made Moose Milk mad. "The hodag is the rarest animal in the whole world. Even on the Olympic Peninsula there probably ain't half dozen of 'em left. Time was when they was all over, wherever there was loggin'. It's one of the world's biggest animals—you find some as much as thirty, forty feet in length. They look a little like them pictures of dragons you see around chop suey parlors. It's got claws like a cougar, a couple of horns like a cow, scales like a lizard, a row of sharp spikes down its back, and a long tail like an alligator."

"Why should the creature be interested in logging?" Slater wanted to know.

"Because its favorite food is condensed milk. Ask any camp cook what it means when he finds out that a case or two of condensed milk has been stolen from the cook shack during the night. He'll tell you he knows it's because a hodag's been by."

"How does it open the cans—with its claws?"

"Now I'm sure glad you asked that question," Moose Milk looked around the circle of faces and cleared his throat a little. "The way it opens them cans—that's what makes the animal so unusual. At the end of that long tail it has a little iron hook, just like a can opener. And that's what it uses to open the cans."

Well, Slater looked at Moose Milk O'Brien for as much as a quarter of a minute, glanced at the crowd around the table, then suddenly turned to the back of the room and let out a whistle. Right away the sailors got up from the piano and came sauntering over, kind of hitching up their pants. "What's wrong, mate?" one of them said.

"I just want to tell that fellow sitting there"—and he pointed at Moose Milk—"that he's the biggest damn liar I ever heard." Moose Milk jumped up fast, kicked away his chair. So did Slater. Axel Olsen grabbed his bungstarter and was over the bar in one jump. But it was Fern who quieted things. She came pushing through the men. "Shame on you, boys," she said. "Shame on you." And she stamped her foot. She got mad as a hornet, though, when she understood what Moose Milk had been telling. When she had gentlemen—and she repeated the word gentlemen—visiting her establishment, she wasn't going to stand for having them insulted by an ignorant timberbeast just in from the woods.

That cut deep. First Moose Milk turned red, then he got white and you could tell he was mad clean through. Maybe that gin and bitters was working on his ulcer, too, because he said, "Just let him show me one of them there giraffes and I'll show him a hodag, any time he says."

The silence that followed this was about as awkward as you could expect. Slater couldn't think of anything to say and apparently Moose Milk realized his temper had led him to say something that sounded silly, because suddenly he got all red in the face again. It was Axel Olsen who broke the tension by bringing his bungstarter down on a barrelhead and yelling, "Drinks on the house—the hodag special."

That made everybody laugh and turn to the bar—everybody, that is, but Moose Milk and Fern. She was just white, she was so mad. She said, kind of low, "You've humiliated me," then turned and left him standing alone.

Moose Milk says he doesn't remember just how he got out of there. He only knows that suddenly he was walking down the main street of Port Angeles, his ulcer hurting like sin. There was another bar all lighted up and he went in. They happened to have condensed milk, just as good as at Fern's place, and plenty of rye.

When the first mouthful of it hit his stomach, he said, it was as if the top of his head suddenly rose right up and touched the ceiling then came down again, slow. But right after that he felt better. And after the second glass his stomach didn't hurt at all.



DAWN was breaking when he left that bar. He never felt such a well man in his life. His step was never so sure and steady, nor was his sight keener or his hearing sharper. There wasn't a single reason he could think of for staying in Port Angeles. So far as he was concerned, he didn't care if he never saw the place again. By following the highway a piece, he'd come to a trail, he knew, that would soon take him back into the woods. That was all he wanted now—to get back into the woods.

It was a beautiful morning. The distant snowcapped Olympics gleamed in the rising sun, the air was clean and sweet, the birds sang like mad from the thickets of fern, and a brook running alongside the trail talked happily to itself. And with every step Moose Milk felt even better. Couldn't have been traveling more than three-quarters of an hour, he said later, when he realized he was being followed. It's a feeling a man gets when his senses are at their most alert. He stopped to listen. Sure enough, on the still air there came that same slight sound he'd noticed. Kind of a heavy breathing—a little like a bear's, but not exactly, and something like an elk too. So he broke into a run, just to see what it would do. Sure enough, it loped right after him, keeping carefully out of sight all the time.

Moose Milk decided it must be a cougar, the way it was acting. They're awfully curious animals. If it was a cougar, though, it was the biggest in those parts. Moose Milk decided to have a look at it. He ducked into a thicket of ferns. After a while the animal would come by to see what happened to him, he knew.

He was right. Pretty soon he heard it give a kind of cough, not fifty feet away. All along, Moose Milk remembers, he never felt less fear in his life. He still wasn't scared when the thing came in sight, he says, though it would have frozen the blood of anybody else and kept it cold for a long time. You could call it an animal only if you don't care what you say. On its great head grew two horns like a cow, its huge paws had claws like a cougar, it was covered with scales like a lizard, a row of sharp spikes grew down the twenty foot length of its back, and its enormous alligator-like tail twitched back and forth as it advanced cautiously forward. Saliva dripped from its enormous red jaws, and above its huge nose two evil topaz eyes peered suspiciously. But the most striking thing about the beast was at the end of its tail—a little iron hook, just like a can opener, which kept opening and closing spasmodically.

He'd just let it pass by him, Moose Milk decided. Now he knew where its lair was, he'd come back some time with his equipment and capture it. Any number of zoos would pay plenty for a catch like this. He waited, holding his breath, until he heard it sound its cough a long way beyond. Then he crept out of the thicket, as quiet as a cougar, and sprinted down the trail.

He never ran faster in his life, and never made less noise about it, either. But the beast was after him, all right, and was even faster than he was. He heard it galloping behind him, that metal hook clicking like a rattle-snake's rattle, coughing as it came, and suddenly Moose Milk was on the ground with most of the breath knocked out of him and fighting for his life. Try as hard as he could, there

seemed no place his fingers could get a grip on those hard, shiny scales. The beast seemed to want to pin his shoulders to the ground, like a wrestler, so it could get its tail and that clicking metal hook into position to tear at Moose Milk's body. When he realized what it was trying to do, fear gripped Moose Milk for the first time. All that condensed milk in his stomach—that's what the beast was trying to get at. It was crazy for condensed milk and could smell it from miles away. Now it meant to rip him open with that metal hook as if he were a can of the stuff.

How long the battle raged, Moose Milk could never recall—maybe an hour, maybe two. Twice he got away and twice the beast brought him down again. And then suddenly, clear and sweet on the still morning air, came the sound that saved him. A gut hammer at some distant camp, calling the lumberjacks to breakfast. The effect of that sound on the animal, Moose Milk says, was startling. Ears cocked, it listened and sniffed the air. Wherever there's the sound of a gut hammer, there'll be the smell of coffee and condensed milk. When it rang again, the creature answered with a cough like a joyful bark and went crashing off into the forest.



HOW long he lay there, Moose Milk doesn't exactly know, but it was getting dark when he opened his eyes and felt he had enough strength to move. When, about eight that evening, he pushed open the doors of The Elite and staggered in, everybody was so shocked by his appearance that for a minute nobody could say a word or make a move toward him, not even Fern. There was no doubt

that at last some wild creature of the woods had gotten the best of Moose Milk O'Brien. His clothes were in ribbons, he was covered with blood. He stood there, one hand on the bar to steady himself, swaying a little and blinking in the light. Then he said, "Just don't let nobody ever tell me there's no hodags." And with that Moose Milk keeled over into the sawdust.

The whole story didn't come out, of course, until he'd been in the hospital for a while and had gotten his strength back. Since then he's added a detail here and there, as it came back to him, but in the main that's the way he tells of meeting the hodag. The experience changed him considerably. For one thing, it cured his stomach ulcer—at least he doesn't treat for it any more—and for another, he never went back into the woods. Visit him sometime on his chicken ranch near Mukilteo and he'll tell you why. There's too much curiosity about that hodag. Too many people keep pestering him to show them the place where he saw it and he knows that if he walks so much as a quarter mile into the woods again, some curious damn fool is sure to try following him. That would be endangering lives and he won't take that responsibility. And to all the suggestions that he capture the hodag for some zoo, he gives the same answer—no cage on earth could hold an animal like that.

As for Fern, well, she says, that when a gentleman—and she repeats the word gentleman—like her husband not only claims to have seen what he saw but went through what he did to prove it, he shouldn't have to go off into the woods again for anybody. His word should be enough.



PACING PAUL BUNYAN

If all the lumber sawed by George Gilles, of Longview, Washington, were now available to build houses, it would be enough to erect a city of 143,000 average-size homes! In 38 years as a mill sawyer, he has cut 2,436,000,000 board feet.

Northwestern lumbermen say his closest contender is Tom Shannon of the same town, with 750,000,000 board feet, enough to build a mere 44,000 homes.

—ADRIAN F. NADER





ILLUSTRATED BY
L. STERNE STEVENS



By
**HENRY JOHN
COLYTON**

THE STORY THUS FAR:

IN THE years 1169-71, Ireland was invaded by a handful of Norman knights, men-at-arms and Welsh archers—less than a thousand men all told—the Norman adventurers having been brought there by DERMOT MAC MURROUGH, ex-king of Leinster, with the promise of land as a reward for their assistance in putting down his enemies. Among the bold company who set out for Ireland to fight for the Irish chieftain—with the indifferent sanction of their king, HENRY II of England—were SIR BRIAN FITZ-BRIAN, his friends EDMUND DE ST. ERNE and MILO DE CLYDACH, FITZ-STEPHEN, DE PRENDERGAST, DE BARRI, MOUNTMAURICE, the GERALDINES and other impoverished noblemen lured by the chance for riches and power in a new land.

The story is told, many years later, by Fitz-Brian . . . Being, in his forty-first year, confined to bed with serious injuries sustained

Eadmer was dragging a barefooted girl behind him, her long amber hair in two neat braids . . . Ceredwin!

during the jousting at the Earl of Gloucester's tournament, he decides to set down "a true account of the Irish wars"—during which he lost his left hand—"and dealing particularly with the treachery of MAC BREAGH, chief of Ballinmish, and his brother ABBOT AYMON of Killanore, the massacre at Dun Cathach, and the remarkable deeds of the LADY CEREDWIN DE MORREISE . . ."

The long winter after the first perilous crossing of the Normans from Bristol has come to an end. The invaders have spent the first months since their landing on the bleak deserted coast at Dun Cathach restoring the ruins of an old fortress there, in preparation for the operations to come. Early that spring, during a terrible storm, a ship breaks up within sight of the ramparts of Dun Cathach—on the cruel rocks known as the Teeth of Leir—and Fitz-Brian and Milo brave the sea to rescue the survivors, among them being the abbot of Killanore, the lovely Lady Ceredwin de Morreise, and her father SIR ROBERT DE MORREISE. Fitz-Brian, with the assistance of EADMER, his attendant and confidant, fits out the bedraggled girl with some of his own clothing and discovers that she knows him—having watched him joust at the Winchester tournament when she was a youthful novice at St. Milburgh's. Fitz-Brian attempts to make love to her and is shocked to learn that she is betrothed to the abbot of Killanore's brother—the fierce and hairy chief of Ballinmish, Conn Mac Breagh, who is reputed to have one wife already. Meanwhile, the haughty abbot has offered sanctuary to Morreise, who is in disfavor with King Henry.

Three days later, Mac Breagh turns up to take Ceredwin, her father and the abbot back to Ballinmish. He shows his gratitude to Fitz-Brian for rescuing his bride-to-be by presenting him with a pair of magnificent Irish horses. Fitz-Brian secretly gives Ceredwin his dagger and watches her leave in the company of Mac Breagh with misgivings—and jealousy.

Soon comes the news they have been awaiting: Fitz-Stephen has anchored in the mouth of the Bannow nearby with a ship full of armed men, and the trouble is about to begin! Next day, the Normans join forces with Dermot Mac Murrough and his gallowglasses—Irish foot-soldiers armed with vicious short-handled axes—and they set out to lay siege to the walled town of Wexford, a small burgh on the seacoast south of Dublin.

Wexford falls, with scant loss to the invader, and the Normans retire to Dermot's city of Ferns to celebrate the victory. Dermot awards Wexford to Fitz-Stephen and Dun Cathach to St. Erne. The next attack is planned, against Ossory, a district northeast of Ferns, whose chieftain, MAC GILLA PATRICK, has won the

undying hatred of Dermot by gouging out the eyes of his son whom Dermot had left with him as a hostage.

The attack on Ossory is made. After a bitter battle, the Ossory forces are put to rout and Dermot's enemy, Mac Gilla Patrick is slain. Soon after, Fitz-Brian, while out exploring the surrounding country for a likely spot to build his own castle, sees a lone woman coming slowly toward him across the moorland. Barefoot, dressed as a peasant, it is the Lady Ceredwin! She has run away from Ballinmish—and from her lord, Mac Breagh, who had indeed another wife, ETHNEA, who tried to kill Ceredwin and was herself slain by Mac Breagh in the brawl that followed the illegal wedding ceremony.

Fitz-Brian, Milo and Eadmer take Ceredwin to Dun Cathach, where St. Erne has set up his court. Fitz-Brian immediately suspects that St. Erne's interpreter, sent to him by Mac Breagh, is a spy for the Irish chieftain. And his suspicions are confirmed when BROTHER COOLEY disappears that night.

Unpleasant news reaches them from Ferns: the High King of Ireland, RORY O'CONNOR, is gathering a huge force to crush Dermot and his foreign allies. Milo goes to Dermot's aid, while Fitz-Brian takes Ceredwin to the nearby convent, at Kileada, for safety—promising to return for her when the trouble is over.

Fitz-Brian arrives at Ferns to find things in a state of confusion. King Rory has camped out of bowshot of Ferns, and after an exchange of messages—and an unsuccessful attempt by Rory to split his enemies—a truce is made, in which Dermot agrees to accept Rory as his overlord. Rory O'Connor goes home. But it is clear that trouble can be expected from more than one quarter for Dermot and the Norman knights. Fitz-Stephen's half-brother, MAURICE FITZ-GERALD, casts anchor in Wexford harbor with a strong force of archers and mounted men-at-arms. Dermot sends him north to lay siege to Dublin, whose lord, HASCULF MAC TORQUIL, a half-Irish Dane, finally submits to Dermot as his "most loyal subject"—for a while.

Fitz-Brian and Fitz-Stephen locate two fine pieces of territory adjoining St. Erne's holdings, and make the most of a peaceful summer by assisting each other in building their strongholds—Milo's "Castle Perilous" and Fitz-Brian's "Pigsty," named from the boar's head on his coat-of-arms. But the natives are not too friendly; Fitz-Brian dispatches Eadmer to his uncle in Wales to try to raise reinforcements from the family estates.

One day a messenger appears at Pigsty, purporting to be from Milo. He is being attacked and needs help. Fitz-Brian and his men hurry to Castle Perilous, only to find it deserted. The messenger confesses he is LUGAID, brother of

Mac Breagh. Turning toward home, Fitz-Brian runs into Milo and his followers. Milo had received a similar message—and now the two Normans realize they have been duped in order to prevent their sending help to Dun Cathach where Mac Breagh's spy has reported Ceredwin is in hiding. Together they ride to Dun Cathach, where a grisly scene awaits them. All of St. Erne's men have been massacred in cold blood. St. Erne himself lies in the courtyard, his body horribly disfigured, his precious silver cross gone, and the silence of death all around him. Fitz-Brian and Milo despair of finding an answer to the mystery, for no living soul can be found. But then a distant shout is heard and they see a little knot of their men, struggling up toward the steep battlements carrying a wounded man. Someone is left, after all, and they will learn what has happened.

PART III



THEY had found Father Denis. He had been tossed over the rampart, and by God's mercy had only a broken leg, though this was bad enough. Frantic as we were, we made him as comfortable as we could, and waited till he had come well out of his swoon. For a little space he lay staring at Milo and me, muttering prayers, and stared again.

"Then you were not slain by the Irish, my sons?" he panted.

"No, Father," I answered him soberly. "Will you try to tell us what happened?"

He shuddered faintly. "When I saw you here, sound and living, I—I hoped it was a dream—is there no one left?"

"None but you, Father."

"Then let me have a little water—it must be told."

And gallantly he braced himself for the effort, and he told us. And as he spoke, our men came clustering around us, some red-faced with fury, some a wan pale green from heaving up their boots, some snuffling quietly onto a sleeve. And when poor Father Denis gasped with pain, and Milo held a mug of water to his lips, you could hear the hard-drawn breaths, the occasional single curse.

In the foggy dawn, the watchman on the tower had shouted the alarm. The countryside was swarming with yellow shirts. They might have sprung out of the fog itself, so silently had they come. St. Erne, who had been expecting callers for some time, posted his men and made ready for trouble. Cattle might be driven and ricks fired, but Dun Cathach, secure on its rocks, was safe from any attack the Irish could make. So St. Erne watched patiently from the gatehouse while the yellow-shirted hosts milled about.

And then a voice cried out in fair French, demanding a parley.

"Stand out and show yourself," bawled St. Erne. And out of the rising mists rode a stately figure mounted on a cream-white mule—a figure wearing cope and dalmatic and an abbot's mitre. He was attended by a party of black-robed brethren, and the whole affair was so odd that St. Erne gawped like a villein at a fair—but remained prudent.

"Ride up to the edge of the ditch, master abbot," he invited. "You can talk to us right there."

The cream-white mule picked its way daintily up the slope to the edge of the ditch—and then St. Erne recognized the glittering green eyes, the great nose and narrow jaw of Aymon of Killanore, who at once began his homily, in the rich voice that was persuasion itself.

"It grieves me deeply, messire, that I must come before you here with such news, when I have enjoyed the hospitality of your castle—was, in fact, saved here from shipwreck. Nevertheless, so rolls the wheel of fate, and Aymon of Killanore will do you what service is in his power."

"Get on with it," muttered St. Erne. "Dyfydd, keep your eye peeled."

"Has no word reached you, St. Erne, here on this lonely foreland, of the fate of Dermot and Fitz-Stephen? It is no wonder—so few survived."

St. Erne waited, and the abbot went on: "The High King of Ireland carried war to O'Brien of Limerick, who married the daughter of Dermot. Dermot and Fitz-Stephen, with all their force, went to the aid of O'Brien. In the bogs of Limerick they were cut down and slaughtered. Dermot's headless corpse was borne to Ferns—myself I saw it. Dermot of the foreigners is no more—nor yet Fitz-Stephen, the courteous and the bold."

St. Erne said nothing, but, as Father Denis said, his disbelief was written upon his face. It did not seem to distress the abbot.

"If you must be convinced, St. Erne," he said, and beckoned to one of the monks, who came forward, bearing something wrapped in pale silk. The abbot took it reverently, and laid back the silk, and the sun, momentarily piercing the clouds of the morning, gleamed and blazed on gold and jewels. It was a reliquary, made roughly in the shape of a hand.

"The precious Hand of St. Ibar—the holiest relic of Killanore!" breathed the abbot, crossing himself. "Upon it I take oath that Dermot and Fitz-Stephen are dead, and their forces destroyed!"

St. Erne hesitated. After all, as poor Father Denis explained, one does not expect an abbot to swear falsely on a holy relic. Later—much later—I learned the truth of the matter. The

abbot had most carefully and reverently removed the crumbling bones of the saint's hand, and swore without a quail on an empty reliquary. It's hard for me, even now, to think of it without anger, but I guess it was a kind of strategy, and fair in war time—I don't know. St. Erne, however, was a stout-hearted lad enough. He informed the abbot that he regretted the death of his chief and King Dermot, but that this was his land that he had won by the sword, and he was going to keep it.

Abbot Aymon gave back the reliquary to the waiting monk. "The land is not yours by right!" he shouted. "This is the land of the Mac Breagh. Robbed of his land, robbed of his wife—whom you have stolen and keep here a prisoner!"

St. Erne managed a grin. "He's misinformed!" he yelled. "Your spy left too early. The lady who came of her own will, was escorted to a certain convent where she now lives in safety. She says she's going to stay there—says the Mac Breagh is too rough with his wives."

"And this convent—it is . . . ?" asked the abbot gently.

"I don't think I'd better tell you," said St. Erne.

The abbot shook his head. "O Mac Breagh! Wronged and spited, driven from the land of your fathers!" he intoned. "Shall not justice be done? No—our blessed Lord requires mercy. No doubt, St. Erne, you think to remain safe in your strong tower. Perhaps you expect aid from your vassals in the hills." Once again he turned and beckoned. And out of the crowding hosts came a dozen men, dragging one. He was a very tall, brawny lad, arms and legs tightly bound, and a gag of yellow linen covering the whole of his face below the nose. His dark auburn hair hung into his eyes.

"Sir Brian Fitz-Brian," announced the abbot. "Sir Milo de Clydach." They took off this spectacle, and fetched up a slither, shorter fellow, fair-haired, and also gagged and bound. Both were bare naked. Who these two could have been, I don't know—they had been selected for size and coloring.

St. Erne uttered a roar of rage. "Damn you for a pack of heathen! Turn them loose!"

A horse and rider came cavorting up the slope at that moment—the Mac Breagh himself, his long hair flying, his eyes gleaming green. He swung his axe and howled. The abbot held up a hand, and the chief apparently calmed down and reined in the horse.

"Listen to good counsel, St. Erne!" went on the abbot. "Wexford is free of the tyrant at last; but in her harbor lies a ship, ready to take you and your men home to Wales. I myself will ride beside you all the way to assure your safety, and these two rash young men will be released to you. Therefore surrender now! Come out of Dun Cathach in honor, having won

the respect of all Irishmen for your good rule! If you refuse—my brother the Mac Breagh has a particular injury to avenge against these young men, and their end will not be easy—and what will remain to you but to starve? Come out weaponless that we may know no dishonorable attack is planned against us. I am your surety against attack."

"I'll talk it over with my men and let you know." St. Erne was as gray-faced as the day.

Well, why tell more? My heart turns in my breast to write it, even after sixteen years. They laid down their weapons and came forth in good order, trusting the word of the abbot of Killanore. And the Irish fell upon them with their axes. They fought—dear God, how they fought—wrenching weapons from their murderers, and they struggled back over the drawbridge, fighting all the way—but Mac Breagh's forces entered with them, they were hopelessly outnumbered, and the slaughter went on, in hall and bailey, until they were all dead. All dead, my comrades, my friends, the bravest men who ever lived and died.

That was the massacre at Dun Cathach.

CHAPTER IX

THE CAMP OF THE ENEMY



WE LEFT Father Denis, and went outside the walls to pick up Lugaid where we'd dropped him, and the bastard was gone! That was the last straw. How it happened was a puzzle. We'd left him strapped up tight, and the straps were there, slashed through, and he was gone. Probably one of the Irish corpses on the slope had not been so dead as he had looked—and Lugaid was the chief's brother. We were too mad and heartsick even to swear.

Well, we posted a guard and buried our dead as decently as we could. Also we dug a pit for the Irish, after arguing down the Welsh who wanted to let them lie till they rotted and perfumed the breezes. But Evan Vawr, who passes for a kind of jack-leg bard, did something before they shoveled in the dirt that has made the Irish villains give the place its distance even in broad sunshine to this day. Then we all turned to and scrubbed out the hall and the bailey and the stables, which helped work the craziness out of our heads. Then Milo and I, as carefully and gently as we could, set Father Denis' leg, with wooden splints and pieces of an Irish shirt. Then we built a good fire in the hall and took council.

Milo's eyes were red and swollen. "I wouldn't give a pebble from the river shore at Clydach for the whole damn country," he groaned. "Let's get out of here."

"I'm for you." I was pretty bleary-eyed myself. "But we'll pay a few calls first."

We decided to round up what cattle and horses we could, and if worst came to worst we could eat the horses too. But if the rest of Abbot Aymon's story was as false as his oath, Dermot and Fitz-Stephen might be very much alive. In any case, we would hold Dun Cathach for them as long as we could. Eadmer would be coming along soon with the reinforcements, I reminded them. And meantime there was vengeance. It was imprudent of us, but neither Milo nor I would consent to stay in Dun Cathach while the other went about it, so we gave up and decided to go together. This entailed a new castellan. This we turned over to the men—an unusual procedure, I know.

"It won't be any festival, so choose wisely," I said, and highly surprised, but willing, they went at it. It was a good idea, for it took their minds off those fresh brown graves on the green slope below the tower. They argued a while, and then came one by one to Milo, who scratched a tally on a rock, as they spoke their choice, while I eased Father Denis. Ebba won—on condition, they told him, that he did no cooking—and he chose Evan Vawr as his second in command, and that was settled.

They wanted, of course, to accompany Milo and me, but we told them where their duty lay; and to guard against more treachery, we gave Ebba and Evan a secret password, by which, however we might have to disguise ourselves, they might know us, and told them to surrender the castle to nobody else, even if the Pope himself guaranteed them safe passage to Wexford. And then, the watch being changed, we curled up by the fire in our mantles. We were so dog-tired that we slept at once; but I woke about midnight to feel the chill autumn air, and hear the snores of those off watch and the feeble moans of Father Denis. I stirred up the fire. I hadn't had a chance to think, much, but now I kept seeing St. Erne's headless body, and Dyfydd ap Huw sprawled beside the well. I thought of St. Erne's hard work, and how he had built the mill and repaired the roads and tried his best to deal justice to his new subjects, and what was the end of it? A hastily dug grave on a hillslope, his body savagely hacked and butchered, robbed even of his silver cross.

And the worst of it all was the realization that it was, as he had thought, for the sake of Milo and me that he had consented to come unarmed from his strong tower—to save us. We would do our best to repay the Irish, with usury, but we could never change that.

In the next day's dawn, we said good-bye to Ebba and our little garrison, we stood for a moment beside St. Erne's grave, and then mounted and rode westward. We had mulled over the story of Dermot's defeat, and decided to disbelieve it. If Dermot and Fitz-Stephen were dead, and their forces scattered, why had

Mac Breagh and his horde left so quickly after the massacre? Although we knew that in very truth the Dun Cathach country had belonged to the Mac Breagh clan only off and on, when some other gang wasn't occupying it, there would have been no reason why he shouldn't have squatted himself down in our strong tower if he hadn't taken alarm about something. Much later, the O'Clonaghan told us that we ourselves had given the alarm—that some fugitives from the cattle-stealing party had ridden back at a furious gallop, screeching that the foreigners were riding to the attack, and Mac Breagh and his brother had gone away from there in a hurry.

We were too angry and sorrowful to consider what an asinine thing it was for two knights to ride after a whole tribe. We never once thought of the impossible odds; we were going to avenge the murder of St. Erne and his men, and I guess we felt a sort of reliance on God—that He was a gentleman Himself, and would not uphold the breaking of pledged promises. So off we went, to stick our thick heads into the jaws of death, and although I am now middle-aged and prudent, bedamn if I wouldn't do it again.

They had a good start of us, but much of their force was afoot, and the trail was easy to follow across ravaged fields; and even when they climbed the rocky uplands, because they were driving some of our cattle. Sometimes we wondered just how we'd get in touch with the Mac Breagh, but we usually wound up by saying the Lord would provide. Milo was upset about the abbot; he'd been piously reared.

"He's a black-hearted hound, but you'd be excommunicated, Brian."

That was before King Henry's knights wallowed the archbishop on the head, so there was no precedent, you see. But I was pretty wild by that time; the horror that had numbed me at Dun Cathach was wearing off. I said I would take care of the abbot.

"And I'll take Mac Breagh." Milo's boyish face was not pretty to see. "I'll dig out his black liver for him."

"Well, for God's love be careful—and whatever you do, if it ever comes to that, don't take their word for anything—not if they swear on a stack of relics high as your head."

"Do I look that fat-headed?" he snorted.

"Not fat-headed, my lad—only very chivalrous and high-minded; you have always given the other party a chance, and old habits are hard to break."

Milo grinned, blushed and hit me a poke in the stomach—we were resting in the thick undergrowth of a copse while breathing the horses—and a scuffling match ensued. It was undignified in a pair of avengers, but afterwards I felt less sad and old.

The trail of the Mac Breagh forces had grown



A heavy body launched itself upon me, throwing me to the ground.

"Any ideas?" I asked Milo.

"We'd better tether the horses in that grove yonder," he answered, and I knew his mind was as blank as mine. But we rode there and dismounted, and as I was tethering my horse, I saw that Milo was unsaddling; and by the last clouded light in the west, I saw a gleam of yellow in his bedding roll.

fresher as they had slacked their speed of flight—also more scattering. The foot-prints and cow-pats began to go this way and that, as the members of the loosely disciplined army straggled off to their homes. But the chief's party was not hard to follow because most of the horses were in it. We followed them out of the forest and up into the heather, and down again into wild-grown pasture and harvested fields. That was by late afternoon, and we were saying that it was time to go more cautiously, when in the distance we saw the ditch and stockade of what looked like a chief's dwelling. It stood on a low mound, and might have been a house of hospitality, that the Irish are required to maintain by their brehon law—but anyhow, the mound and the wooded land at its foot were swarming with men, and I knew we had come to the end of our journey.

"Irish shirts," he answered my question, shaking them out. "In case we get chased."

"Look," I said, as an idea struck me right over the head, "if Mac Breagh fooled St. Erne with a pair of his party that looked like us, why can't we pull the same trick? Put on these shirts and just wander into the camp as if we belonged there? Our Erse will get us by if we don't talk too much."

Milo came up and embraced me solemnly. "Brian," he said, "you're a wonder. Pay 'em back in their own coin."

"Of course it's risky," I said modestly, but thinking myself it wasn't a bad idea. "We'll have to leave off our helms and chausses. But they'd trimmed the hair and beards of our doubles, which is good—can't grow an Irish brush-thicket overnight."

So we hastily removed our mail chausses and

the woolen ones underneath. The breeze blew chilly on my bare legs, and my head felt uncomfortably light without its helm, but I strapped on my sword over the billowy Irish shirt and tucked up the mail sleeves of my hauberk. Milo asked if we should go barefoot, as most of the Irish kernes do—but I said if we stepped on a thorn and said something in the wrong language, it might betray us sooner than our boots.



MAC BREAGH'S camp looked like any camp by night, at first glimpse. Cooking fires blazed, and we smelled roasting meat, which was distressing, since we'd had very little to eat for two days. They didn't sing together as our Welsh do, although I heard the lost-soul wail of a set of pipes somewhere. This party was small, but well scattered out. We circled around warily, watching frowsty heads bobbing dark against the yellow fire-glow, as they lounged around the remains of dinner. Several wrestling matches seemed to be going on, although they may have been arguments, and we could hear much noisy disputation. My Erse wasn't good enough to follow the talk, but you could tell the drift by watching the gestures and the dirty looks, and then suddenly there would be two of them rolling over and over with their claws in each other's hair, several others would join in, and the whole heap heaved and tore at itself until you'd think no one could survive. And next time you looked, they would all be embracing each other, and passing a leather bag full of gurgles back and forth.

We made the circuit of the camp, ambling slowly with our arms around each other's necks as if we had nothing better to do; but we saw nothing of the Mac Breagh or his brother, the abbot. So we figured that they probably were lodged in the chief's house within the stockade. We turned from the camp and plunged away into the dark, and at once fell down into a dark ravine, or possibly a ditch, although it was too overgrown for that, I believe. Anyhow, we banged down to the bottom, through brambles and over stones, end over end, and Milo swore, gathering himself up, that his neck was broken. I turned to shut him up, rubbing my ankles, when I heard a sudden scuttering of dead leaves behind us.

A heavy body launched itself upon me, throwing me to the ground, and powerful hands gripped my throat. I knew that the lad would utter a screech of triumph the next moment, so I thrashed around wildly, while the night sky went black and red, and got my dagger loose. His knee was in my belly by that time, and his snarling lips so close to my face that I wondered if he was going to take a bite

out of me, like Dermot. So I reached up and gathered him into a tight embrace, and thrust the dagger home between his shoulderblades, awkwardly enough. I heard the knife-point grit on bone and then he gasped, his grip on my throat loosened, and he fell on me. I got out from under, gasping, and rolled him away.

I heard cracklings and thrashings in the brush. Milo must have been set upon at the same time. I was disgusted enough that we had been spotted in spite of our careful disguise, and I charged forward, fast as I could, to help Milo and choke off any disturbance. But it was pitch-black in the gully, and the light of the fires beyond only made it worse, and I blundered this way and that. I heard running feet coming my way, and gasping breaths.

"Milo?" I panted, not having any sense at all.

A sudden screech of triumph, and I saw an arm wave an axe against the yellow fire-glow. "Mac Breagh aboo! Mac Breagh aboo!"

Lugaid!

I had to shut him up. I threw myself forward, and fell on him, with all my weight, just before his own axe fell. I shoved the dagger into him any old way, and his war-cry died into bubbles and gurgles. I got up and looked around. I saw no one else.

"Milo?" I spoke very softly.

There was no answer.

I stumbled back the way Lugaid had come, and fell over Milo's legs.

I caught him up in my arms, holding his head against my shoulder. He did not move or speak. I could not see him in the blackness of the gully, but I felt his lax weight, I felt the warm gushing of blood over my chest and shoulder. His throat had been slashed nearly through by the axe.

"Milo!" I gasped, hardly believing, idiotic. "Milo, you're all right—I'll get you out—"

I caught at his hand. It was warm. The fingers quivered slightly, and then pressed mine. He understood, he knew I was there, he forgave me.

His head lay heavy on my shoulder, and so he died.



I THRUST my dagger back into the sheath, rose to my knees, and got Milo slung over my shoulder. In the cold center of my heart nothing moved, but my mind was flopping like a fish on a sand-bank. I had to get him out. I must get him out of this place, or they would hack up his body. Mac Breagh would have to wait.

I heard voices yelling at each other, beyond the crown of the ridge, and saw the bobbing red glow of a torch. I don't know whether

they had heard Lugaid's war-cry, or whether others than he and his late friend had been following us. I rose upright, gripping Milo's knees. The light would shine down on us in a breath. I could see the stockade of the chief's house on my right, and the tangled blackness of the gully on my left.

I screeched in Erse, "The gate of the house! There they go!"

A howl answered me, and I saw the torch bob away from me along the rim of the gully. I ran the other way, tearing through a bramble-thicket, falling over a slide of rocks—but I never felt anything except the weight across my shoulder and the knees chilling in my grip. I scrambled out of the ravine where it shallowed, and starting running, evading the camp, into a sort of spinney. I heard a stamp and a snort, somewhere in the dark, and I thought "Horses," and saw the rump and tail of one of them as the nearest fire cast a faint glow of red on it. He was tied to a sapling. I ran up, drew my dagger, slashed the rope and caught him by the mane. He bucked and reared, snorting loud enough to be heard in Dublin; it was the blood-smell, of course. Like all well-trained young men, I could mount a horse without touching the stirrup, and I could throw a heavy burden over his withers, too—but not at the same time, and not while the beast was standing on his head trying to free himself from my grip. God knows how I did it, but somehow I was straddle of the horse, and Milo was before me, where the saddle-bow should have been.

My lungs were bursting. I kicked the horse in the ribs. I heard faint yells behind me. The horse was crazy with fright; he tore away into the dark, and I could only flatten out over his neck to avoid being swept off by low branches, and grip the shoulder of Milo's hauberk through the sticky wet linen of his Irish shirt. Then the thundering of my blood began to subside, and I heard hoofbeats and yells coming closer, through the dark.

When I say that I could hardly control the horse, I am not trying to excuse myself; it is plain fact. I had no bridle, I didn't know where I was going, and the weight of Milo's body required all my strength to hold. I yanked at the creature's mane, but he was frantic-wild, running in circles, cannoning into trees, sometimes rearing up on his hind legs, sometimes putting his head down and kicking up behind. My legs were wrapped tight around his barrel, my knees squeezing his ribs, so I stayed put, but his craziness was allowing the pursuers to catch up with us. By the clouded starlight, I thought I could see a sort of clearing ahead, where there might be space to run.

For a change, the horse obeyed my knees, and we charged out of the woods. I was just about to breathe again when he suddenly

plunged hock-deep into a bog, and that was the end of the ride.

I still hoped I could get away. I slid off, and caught up Milo again, sinking knee-deep in the muck, and avoiding the struggling horse as best I could. By God's own grace, I managed to struggle out on firmer ground, only to see the flaring of many torches, and the vicious faces of the men who bore them, horse and foot—dozens, hundreds—waiting.

I laid Milo down very gently, and kissed his cold lips. Then I drew my sword and stood in front of him. The sword had been a nuisance that night—banging into rocks and getting between my legs, but I was glad now to feel the grip of its hilt between my two hands. I knew I was going to die, but I hoped I could give a good account of myself and be a credit to my ancestors and my training first.

The horse was screaming and struggling in the bog, and I was sorry, but a gang of axemen came tearing up at that moment, so I was too busy to think of the horse. I am not trying to be vainglorious, you know, but I say that while the Irish axe is a deadly weapon, it lacks the sweep and swing of a two-handed sword. Several parties found that out right away, and the others backed off. But more came, and more, and the torches gleamed red through the forest, and I heard the yells of the Mac Breagh, coming to avenge the death of his brother. I kept swinging and chopping away, I guess—I don't remember much of that part of the affair. Only after a while they all backed off, and the torchlight gleamed on the blood spouting from the coarse grass tussocks where my handiwork lay. Another party of axemen came running up, shouting; halted, stared, fell silent, and backed away.

I leaned on my sword, and wiped my forehead on my shoulder, wondering dimly why I was sweating so when the night was so cold. Then I saw a movement among the clustering murmuring crowd, and I got ready, figuring they were going to rush me. But only one man emerged from the mass—a tall man in a long dark mantle, his left hand lifted high.

"Fitz-Brian, do you recognize me?" his rich voice demanded.

"Sure I do," I panted, "and so will the devil, if you come a bit closer."

"I am unarmed," he said, stopping in his tracks.

"So was St. Erne," I answered, "when he came out of Dun Cathach, trusting your oath."

He didn't like that; he knew enough of decency for it to make him uneasy. "A pity for St. Erne, and he a brave man, but we are fighting for our land, and the blessed saints will pardon us. You are a lost man, Fitz-Brian. You have slain my youngest brother, the pride of our hearts, Lugaid the swift-footed. He saw you in camp this night, but we

wished to avenge alone the personal insult you dealt him." The rich voice broke, as he fell silent, and behind him, shouting broke out, and arms waved axes.

"Too bad," I said, "for he hadn't learned all the ways of his tribe yet. Otherwise he would have called in all his friends and taken oath on a reliquary and offered to escort me to Wexford."

He drew back, frowning, and then tried it again.

"The Mac Breagh wishes to speak to you through me, Fitz-Brian." He gestured, and I saw the huge form of the chieftain come striding into the torchlight, eyes glaring above his beard, axe raised high. He roared at me in Erse, and I showed my teeth at him.

"You stole his wife, you killed his brother, and many of our loyal men lie slaughtered here by your hand," intoned Abbot Aymon. "Yet because of your taunts, his pride is touched—he asks to fight you, man to man."

"What does he mean, man to man?" I laughed. "Him and how many others?"

"I swear no oath to you, Fitz-Brian, since plainly you do not believe my word," the abbot reproached me. "There will be no interference. You and he will fight each other naked and without weapons. If you survive his just vengeance, we will leave all vengeance to God."

"That suits me," I said.

You understand, I was not fooled. I was no lamb going to the slaughter. I knew what would happen to me. But I thought that this would give me a chance to damage Mac Breagh in the eyes of his tribe, which would be a last pleasant thought to carry along with me to purgatory.

"And all of you back off," I shouted. "I feel shy about undressing with so many around me."

The abbot interpreted, and the crowd backed off growling.

I never wrestled myself out of a hauberk so fast in my life.



MAC BREAGH strode forward, the torches and the rest following. They made a ring around us. Mac Breagh was a sight without his clothes; he was as heavily furred as a wolf, almost. He lifted his arms on high and howled, and charged at me.

I knew that he planned to knock me out at once with a trick fall, since he probably thought that the base invader knew nothing of wrestling. Truth to tell, I didn't know much—it's not part of knightly training, but I had picked up a few things from Mac Cloghan's men those summer evenings, just for the fun of it. So when he came at me carelessly, I locked my leg around his and twisted his arm like a wet shirt, to his pained surprise. Before

he could recover, I hooked his foot from under him and he sat down hard, with me on his stomach. I was fully as big as he was, although I wasn't hung with tapestry like a hall at Christmas, so I guess he found me rather slippery to grab. We rolled over and over, and I wound my hands into the miniver on his chest until he shrieked and kicked, and the crowd yelled its outrage, and the abbot had all he could do to keep order, I daresay.

Some have accused me of exaggerating my success here. I say that what I write is plainest truth, so help me. The Mac Breagh had been taken by surprise, and it is too bad to be taken by surprise in a wrestling match. Likewise I had no concern about my life, for I knew I would lose it, so I just bent all my strength toward the damaging of the Mac Breagh. And while I tugged and strained, and bent the Mac Breagh's elbow around into his ear, I was remembering St. Erne, and Dyfydd ap Huw, and Father Denis. I thought of the castles Milo and I had built together, and how we had thought we would be neighbors, and feast together, and bring civilized ways to the land, and see our children marry. Far away, it seemed, I could hear a gang of kernes yelling at each other, and the frantic neighing of a horse—they were trying to get my mount out of the bog. I felt relieved.

Mac Breagh flopped over suddenly, and I had all I could do for a bit. He was sore as fury at the length of time I'd made him lie on his back, and he kept trying to hit me back of the ear, and his fist would have felled a bull, if aimed straight. We rolled over and over again, and I guess we pulled each other to our feet, somehow. He backed away, his fists opening and closing, foam on his beard, his eyes crazy. The tribe was screeching and whooping. He shut his eyes and charged me, blindly, like a wild boar. I stooped, and my head rammed his belly. It nearly broke my neck, but it spread the Mac Breagh flat on the grass with the breath knocked from him.

I stood over him, the torches whirling around and around in my head; the crowd sighed, waiting for their chief to rise up and tear me in two halves. But he didn't rise.

My vision cleared slowly, and I saw, rising and falling amid the fur on Mac Breagh's chest, St. Erne's silver cross on its chain.

A flood of scarlet seemed to roll before my eyes.

"You lying, murdering, treacherous dog!" I howled, grabbing for the chain. "Give back what you stole!"

It seemed to me that come heaven or hell, I had to get back that cross, if it were my last act on this earth. I had grabbed it with my left hand; I did not transfer my grip, but set my foot on his chest and hauled and tugged and yanked, keeping my right hand free,

ready to deal with any interference. The links held. The mob had grown silent. The chief was still down, helpless, and the foot of the invader planted firmly in the fur of his chest. I was just considering using both hands and to hell with the risk, when Abbot Aymon uttered a shuddering scream, and sprang at me.

"Sacrilège! Sacrilège!" he shouted. "The holy cross!" He lifted his arm, there was an axe in it, and he smote off my left hand at the wrist.

I went backward heels over head, and hit the ground so hard that my breath left me, and most of my wits. I felt no pain—I sprawled helpless, waiting for them to finish me. The blood-howl of the tribe rang and rang in my ears, and above it the great voice of the abbot, ordering them back. In my last conscious moment, I felt something tighten viciously around my left forearm, and a warm spouting of blood over my naked body, and I tried to gabble a prayer.

CHAPTER X

THE CRYPT OF ST. IBAR



OUT of the darkness I came soaring again, screaming, and in my nostrils the smell of hot pitch and cooked meat. They were holding me down—I didn't know who—and I remember thinking, "Why, this is hell—I've missed purgatory—" and a booted foot kicked me in the side, but it was nothing. Awful, shuddering-sick, red-hot waves of agony washed over me, again, again, again, like waves on a beach, and at last washed me, by God's mercy, back into the dark again.

Even when the pain woke me, I was still in the dark. Pitchy darkness it was, and damp and clammy-cold. I strained my eyes, but there was no light at all. I wondered if I was blind. I considered that for a long, long time, with my throat too dry to gulp down the fear. At last I set my teeth, lifted my right hand, and touched my eyelids. They seemed sound, so I guessed that I was in a dungeon, and I wondered where they'd found a dungeon in Ireland.

Pain lay beside me, throbbing, throbbing. The slight effort necessary to raise my hand had made it so much worse that I determined not to move again. But my mind was perfectly sound—then—and it worked and churned like a mill-race. I knew my hand was gone. I recalled the sickening odor, and guessed that they must have dipped the stump in hot tar to stop the bleeding. In short, they had saved my life! I was not grateful. I was violently sick at my stomach instead, and fainted.

My own groans woke me. I heard footsteps, and I choked off the noise, gritted my teeth and

tried to get ready for whatever horror was coming. Light beat red on my shut lids.

I heard a sigh, and the rustle of straw, and a horny hand laid itself on my forehead, quite gently.

I opened my eyes. The light was brilliant, I thought, as a whole tournament of torches, and tears rolled down my cheeks. I heard a voice, a man's voice, with the unmistakable scrape and quaver of age.

"Sir Brian—Sir Brian—what can I do for ye?"

"Who are you?" I croaked, still trying to see.

"It's poor old Brother Teague, as ye saved from drownin' once—sorrow the day that sees ye this way!"

I blinked away the dazzle. The light came from a meager dish of oil with a rag in it, and over me bent a gentle old face, with withered pink cheeks and round, distressed blue eyes staring at me.

"L-look, could you—water, just a drop? Pour it in my mouth, and don't touch me, for God's sake!"

"I'll be liftin' your honor easy-like—here's the water."

He slipped his hand under the straw on which I lay, and raised my head, and held a horn mug to my lips. I gulped down the cold water, all of it.

"What is this place?"

"It's Killanore Abbey, your honor—the abbot had ye brought here for your curin'," he replied.

"In a dungeon?"

"Truly, it's the old crypt of the Chapel of St. Ibar." His eyes avoided mine. "Ye know well enough, your honor, that the sick need darkness and quiet."

Well, I'd heard that (although my surgeon says it's nonsense). But something else was in my mind.

"Brother Teague, will you get me out of here? Not because I fished you out of the water that time—I was glad to—but of your charity to a man in distress, and for the love of God. I've got to get out."

The hand touched my forehead again. "It's feverish ye are, Sir Brian, and you without strength to stand on your two legs, and your poor arm in such a state."

I clutched at his gray gown. "I'll make it, I'll make it. Get me something to cover my nakedness, and I'll manage. I've got to bury him."

"Who, your honor?"

"I led him into danger, I did it, it was my fault he died," I babbled. "I've got to bury him, I've got to save his dead body from these bloody damned savages—" I began to sob, and that did it; he thought I was out of my head. So he agreed, humoring me; it

would be a hard task and I should rest myself first.

"I can manage," I assured him. "I've got one hand left. You'll help me, won't you, and pray for him?"

"Sure and I will," he soothed me, "and here's a fine blanket to cover ye warm, and go to sleep first, your honor."



"Sacrilege! Sacrilege!" Abbot Aymon shouted. "The holy cross!" He lifted his arm, and there was an axe in it.



HE DIDN'T need to worry. I was desperately ill for days, screaming and moaning and truly out of my head with fever. Sometimes I recognized him, as he dosed me or gave me water, or laid cold wet cloths on my inflamed stump. But the other things that came into the crypt must have been in my own head.

I survived, somehow. I remember lying on my straw in the dark, weak and helpless as a child new-born, when I heard the pattering of many feet, and saw a brighter light than

Brother Teague's oil-dish. Behind it, I could see a number of persons coming toward me—gray-robed monks, tonsured in the old Irish fashion, across the front instead of on the crown. They stepped aside, holding up their torches, and I saw a tall man with gleaming green eyes coming at me—Aymon!

One of the monks had been carrying a stool, which he set down, and the abbot arranged himself on it. He was wearing a gown of dull blue, the sleeve-hems and front curiously ornamented with gold and colored embroidery, very rich. I looked at him, and then I looked

around me; I could see more of the low damp stone walls and rudely vaulted ceiling than I had before.

"Sir Brian!" The abbot spoke sharply, as if to distract my wandering attention. "You see I kept my word to you, despite the wrath of the Mac Breagh. Your life is preserved, you have been cared for. Can you sneer now at the honor of the Mac Breagh?"

"Yes," I said, doing it. "I understood you to say that there would be no interference when MacBreagh and I were tangling. I don't know what you call chopping off a man's hand, right in the middle of a fight, but I'd call it interference, and I think any court of chivalry would do the same."

His eyes narrowed; a flush appeared on his high cheek bones. "I shed your blood, and through ordinary circumstances it would have been deadly sin, in the face of your sacrilege—your mishandling of the cross—it was just punishment that I was dealing out."

"Then somebody in your tribe ought to be one-handed, because that silver cross belonged to my liege, St. Erne, and it didn't get off his neck by itself!"

He clamped his narrow jaws hard and set his teeth. He was furious.

"Despite your impious and bold speech, Sir Brian, I pardon you. You have been ill. Hold up his arm, Brother Conn."

Brother Conn, a scraggly party with a thick black beard, stepped up at once, looking pleased. He jerked the blanket from me, and caught up my left arm by the elbow. I knew it was coming—I was prepared, in a way, so although the pain tore through me and nearly made me sick, I clamped my teeth hard, and didn't yelp. I blinked away black clouds of faintness and saw what was left. It wasn't pretty. The tar was wearing off, and the raw festering flesh showed swollen red through the streaks of black, and the ends of the white bones, where the flesh had shrunk away, gleamed in the light.

"It is a sad pity," said the abbot sternly, "a young man like yourself maimed for life. It has caused you much suffering, I am sure; yet less suffering than your sinful heart! If you are not yet aware of your vile sacrilege—worse far than that of him who only laid hand on the Ark of the Lord to steady it, and was smitten of God—surely your conscience is not dead to all remorse! You doubtless think of St. Erne, whose loyal vassal you were supposed to be, and how he and his men are dead because," he was very definite and plain here, "because you forced him to give harborage to your paramour, the wife of the Mac Breagh! You think of Sir Milo de Clydach, whose friend you were supposed to be, and how he would yet be living, if in your wicked folly and desperation you had not led him into peril!

I know—you are a man, not a beast, and you must have a conscience—that your soul is bitterly ashamed. Yet although your sins are scarlet, they may be cleansed to the whiteness of wool. Show a repentant spirit by restoring to the Mac Breagh his wife whom you stole, and your conscience may—"

"My conscience is doing all right." I bared my teeth, and spat out some blood. "If the rest of me were as easy as my conscience, I'd ask for no bed of down." It was a lie, partly, but you can see why I said it.

He rose in a fury, his hands clenching and unclenching.

"I can only pray for you," he gritted, and strode out, followed by the monks.

But he had been right, damn him. I had slain St. Erne and his men, as surely as if I had been a yellow-shirted villain with an axe; not because the Mac Breagh had used an imitation of me to draw St. Erne from Dun Cathach, but because I had brought Ceredwin there to his peril. I should have taken her to the convent at once. I could have taken her overseas to Wales. She was innocent of harm, poor little soul. It had been my own very great fault, and mine only; Milo would have agreed to any sensible suggestion.

And Milo—

"No!" I yelled, and the low vault smothered the noise. "No! Don't be a fool! He went with me because he wanted to—he was my friend—he was my friend—"

He was my friend, and he was dead.



YOU may have noticed how hard it is to remember your dreams the next morning? You may have a few swimmy notions of monstrous impossibilities, like jumping off the church tower and floating earthward like a bit of down, but although you may try to remember more, you can't, not if your life depended on it.

And I cannot remember much of my stay in St. Ibar's crypt, either. I must remember it in my dreams, I suppose, for I wake up myself and others with my yells; but it is all a nameless horror of red-shotten black.

And I may as well confess it; when I came out of Killanore Abbey at last, I was as mad as a March hare. Gibbering and drooling and fouling myself, like the village idiot. I don't like to admit this, and very few people know it, and they are loyal to me. My wits are about as good as they ever were, I guess. But if, in the heat of a friendly argument around the fire after the stag-hunt, one of my neighbors yells at me, "Are you crazy, Fitz-Brian?" it upsets me. Because I was crazy, once.

After Aymon's visit, I have only a few memories before the awful dark shuts down. I was thirsty, and I waited and waited for

Brother Teague; and at last I crawled away from the straw of my bed, and found a damp stone, and licked it to refresh me, holding my left elbow bent so that the feverish eternal throbbing of the stump would not hurt so much. I did not want to think of other things, so I wondered what had happened to my grandfather's ring, that I had worn on my left forefinger. I tried not to foul my bed-straw, but after a while no effort was necessary, for I was empty. I lay on the straw and got personally acquainted with the devil. For there is one, and he took possession of me.

I saw St. Erne's headless body, all gashed and hacked with axe-strokes; and I heard the last bubbling of the blood in Milo's gashed throat; and I looked again at the hall of Dun Cathach, with the blood-stains on the floor and Dyfydd ap Huw lying by the well. I told them I knew it was my fault, and I begged them to be alive again, and forgive me, and let me die, and I held up my handleless arm to



Brother Conn caught up my left arm by the elbow—I knew it was coming, and I clamped my teeth hard and didn't yelp.

show them, although it was very heavy and painful to lift. I must have made some noise, for once I heard footfalls and voices, and saw light, and I cursed the dark shapes that moved suddenly, and I felt a terrific blow in my back, and heard a rib snap. And a red thrust of pain took everything away.

And once, I heard the rich voice of Aymon saying, "You will not die, Fitz-Brian. You will live to repent." And I smiled, thinking, I'll fool you, I will die, and get loose, and find Milo and St. Erne; and the voice of Brother Teague quavered a protest somewhere. I lay and held my breath, so that I could die. And I heard a girl singing, very far away, an old Welsh cattle-croon.

After that, I suppose I went completely crazy in the black vault of St. Ibar. They must have given me food and water, from time to time, because of course I didn't die. They had no such idea of mercy.

Elsewhere you can read how Raymond Fitz-Gerald, that they call Le Gros, he being as broad as he is high, sailed into Waterford harbor and built himself a stick and dirt castle; and how three months later, Richard de Clare, that they call Strongbow, turned up with a big force of men and took Waterford for King Dermot, and married my old friend the beautiful Aoife, while the streets ran blood and the shrieks of the citizens drowned the responses. How Hasculf the Dane, who was lord of Dublin, revolted against Dermot again, and how Strongbow and Dermot fixed that up, and chased Hasculf and his followers out to sea. Milo de Cogan, one of the Fitz-Geralds, of course, and a tough lad he was, too, was left in charge of Dublin, while Strongbow swept everything before him.

I think Strongbow did hope to be King of Ireland, succeeding his savage old father-in-law, although that's against Irish use, for a man to hold land in right of his wife. But on sword land, the old laws change. He was a good man, and Ireland could have done far worse. You can read all about these matters elsewhere, in the book written by Gerald de Barri, the archdeacon of Brecknock. He considers the Fitz-Geralds only a bit lower than the archangels; and some of us old settlers, for the fun of it, filled him up with all manner of big tales about the Irish, which he solemnly recorded. But it is a good account, and in choice Latin. I am telling only what I know, and nearly a year dropped out of my life at this time.



HOW my wits came back to me, I can remember only by fits and starts. There was long darkness, and then a faint gleam of light, and then darkness again, and pain,

and another gleam, and more darkness.

Rain wet on my face, I was being half-dragged, and half-carried, and a voice quavered in my ear. Red light, and dark shapes, and I tried to draw away, lest they touch my arm. And then a cruel jolting, and a never-ending whimpering moan, that I guess must have come from me.

Then nothing. And then my wits come back in fire and agony such as man never knew, and my mouth is stuffed full of rags on which I choke and strangle; but over my head I see, clearly, the mossy green of a great rock-slab, and a faint line of light.

Then—the blackness fades to gray and objects swim around in it mistily, as they do when you come half-awake in a winter's dawn. I was lying in comfort on something warm and soft. I saw walls of rough stone and I thought I must be in a cave. I smelled sheep, strongly, and heard somebody clear his throat; I knew I must not move, or I would hurt.

When I woke, I saw clearly the rock walls, and a gleam of sunlight through a rift, and tarnished foliage beyond. Sitting beside me, grim-faced and mending a bridle, was Eadmer.

He was a sight to behold. Whiskers all over his face, and he was dressed in a shirt and a pair of sheepskins, tied fore and aft around his neck. He frowned, and on his bony right arm was a long red scar.

"Eadmer," I said, and meant to go on—but he flung down the bridle, and stood on his knees beside me, his gooseberry eyes bulging from their sockets, and his face, through the whiskers, a wan gray.

"G-good God almighty." He licked his lips carefully. "M-my lord, d-do you know me?"

"Certainly, you jackass—who's been currying of you lately?" I answered, although the thick faint croak didn't seem to be my voice. He ran out, sheepskins flapping, and came back, almost at once, dragging a barefooted girl in a gown of patched sacking, her long amber hair in two neat braids, her eyes huge and blue.

Ceredwin!

Staring, I said, "What's going on here?"

She sat down suddenly, as if her knees had given way, and I saw her swallow. She thrust back a loose short curl of her hair from her forehead, tucking it under with care. The light from the cave door seemed shining through her face.

"You've been sick," she said. "This is a kind of grave."

"Oh, Lord!" I grunted. "I wish you'd make sense—just once."

Eadmer sat down beside her, frowning at me. "My lady's right. This here is an old grave. I have out some bones—heathen, so they don't count. We're on this island, Inch-na-Droa, they call it—folks are scared of it, hereabouts, and won't go near it, so that's good, see?"

"No," I answered. "I don't see." I moved feebly; I lay on sheepskins.

"I went a-hunting of you last winter, but I didn't find no trace of you—not even bones. So I went and told my lady, see, and she would come and look for you." A slow purple rose in his face. "I know it weren't proper. I couldn't do nothing with her. I'd combed the hills and the bogs, but she says, probably the Mac Breagh's got you, or you'd 'a' been back. So we went to Ballinnish, like a beggar and his wench, begging your pardon, my lady, I'm sure—and I played deaf and dumb, because I can't talk the damned language good enough. She done the begging. She smeared her face and tied up her hair, and she looked real homely—begging your pardon, my lady."

He looked abased, but she only bowed her head gravely.

"We didn't have no luck in Ballinnish, so she thought of Killanore Abbey, and remembered as Brother Teague was almoner there. So we went to get a hand-out—we needed it, too—and she saw Brother Teague. He's a real nice feller—for an Irishman."

He rubbed his nose, and ended, "He said you was there, my lord."

"And was I?"

"Such as you was, yes, my lord." He might have said more, but I saw a small brown hand close on his wrist.

"That's quite enough," said she, "and to think they say women talk too much! Go to sleep. I haven't started dinner yet."

Something, in the dark depths I was struggling out of, rose and roiled the waters—something horrible, hideous. It would find me, if I—I shut my eyes, tight, and sleep took me.



IT TOOK me some time to get the story, and when I did, I could hardly believe it. That blundering, bull-headed Englishman, and that mad girl, had straggled all over Ossory and Leix, clear up into Meath, begging their way, and inquiring cautiously into the fate of a hated foreigner—and she the lost bride of the Mac Breagh! And in the end, finding me, which was rather like finding a man long buried in a forgotten grave. And more than that.

Already in peril of their lives, they took on a gibbering madman. By some device of God, Abbot Aymon had been summoned to a synod at Cashel. Brother Teague wanted to get me away quick, but Ceredwin refused. I was too ill, she said. So in desperation, he recalled this old stone grave on Inch-na-Droa, the Druids' Isle, and Eadmer carried me there.

When they got me to the cave, they had a look, and a shock, I suppose. I was nothing but whiskers and bones; to all appearances dying, and hardly worth burying.

"And smelling as if you'd ought to 'a' been buried a month before," Eadmer explained. "Phew!" And then, turning the pale green of young pease at the bare memory, he told me what else the Lady Ceredwin had done.

With daylight shining in at the cave door, she had turned her attention to what was left of my arm, as cool and interested as if it had been a new sleeve pattern straight from Paris.

"It hasn't healed, ever, and he won't get well until it does," she said. "Eadmer, when you see Brother Teague this evening, ask him for a saw and pair of scissors and a needle and some fine silk thread and clean linen. They make and embroider their own vestments and altar cloths at Killanore, so they should have the stuff. And we've got a knife. Now let's wash him."

That must have been the time I remembered—of the awful pain, and my mouth stuffed with rags—to gag me with, in case anyone might be hanging around the island. To make it brief, and not upset anyone's dinner, she bound my arm tight above the elbow, and then slit the flesh at the wrist like a too-tight sleeve. Then she sawed off the noisome projecting ends of the bones, and brought the lips of the flesh together, and sewed them neatly with the silk thread. Then she bandaged the remains thick and firm, helped Eadmer out of the cave and held his head for him.

I meet great physicians when I go to London and Paris now and then, and they're all the same—they not only won't believe what I tell them of how it was done, but they get mad as fire at me, saying I have no business being alive; that melted lead and scorpion's fat must be used, and that no base barber-surgeon could understand the art of it, and as for a delicate female—! Yet, when one day I asked her about it, Ceredwin squirmed and said, "Sister Agatha and the others at the convent used to do it, only the wounded knights usually died. We used to take turns watching 'em through a hole in the wall, to see who of us would get sick first."

Would you think that of tender little girl-novices, now? Sometimes I think it's a good thing women don't wage war. I expressed my shocked surprise, and she only laughed.

"But wasn't it a good thing that we did? It had to be done, messire, you know. I didn't want to hurt you, but it had to be done." And then she picked up the scissors and charged down on me. I was still pretty weak, but I reared back and swore.

"Your hair is full of bugs," she declared, "and I've seen all I'm going to of that horrid red beard. You have beautiful hair, when it's clean, but the beard is coming off. Hold still."

I held still as required, and stared at her.

She had changed. She was taller than she had been, and new and lovely curves rounded out above and below her slender waist, sweetly as swells of song. Nor was that the only change, though it was enough to keep you busy looking. She was no more the prim damsel of the moors and the road to Kileeda than she was the hero-worshipping child I had kissed at the tournament. Her face was thin and summer-browned, her jaw was determined, and she had developed a free-and-easy behavior that I thought disconcerting and faintly improper. She had no respect for me, nor yet any disapproval, either. She clipped off my beard, and cut my hair off close to the scalp; then she worked the scissors thoughtfully, called in Eadmer from the river where he had been trying to fish, and trimmed him, too. He protested.

"Now my lady—don't we need to go disguised? Hey!"

"You're supposed to be men, not haystacks," she said. "Don't worry. The sight of either one of you would make anybody run, even now."

I stared at the pile of hair. "I never knew it to grow so fast," I said. She sat back on her heels, and looked at me thoughtfully.

"You're going to be surprised, Sir Brian," she said. "Today is the eve of St. Michael's Mass."

The dark waters stirred again. The dreadful shape rolled almost to the surface. I shut my eyes, but I could see it—it was coming—it—

"It can't be," I said. "They—they attacked Dun Cathach on St. Luke's Mass—and that's the middle of October. And St. Michael's Mass is—the last of September—and they attacked Dun Cathach—Dun Cathach—"

The stone slabs of the old grave whirled this way and that. I heard Ceredwin's voice, matter-of-fact and low, "That was nearly a year ago, Sir Brian. I thought you'd be surprised. Eadmer—be careful."

I struggled to sit up, to get away—my legs would not move under the sheepskins. "Dun Cathach! Dun Cathach! They are all dead! All dead! All my fault—oh, God!"

The horror burst full upon me and I screamed.

Ceredwin wrapped her arms around me and clapped a hand over my mouth. I struggled. She was stronger than I, and her roughened palm was firm on my writhing mouth.

"Don't talk nonsense, messire," she said, cold as a bucket of icy water full in the face. "Stop that noise. Plenty of us are alive. I am, for one, and I'm going to stay that way, I hope, so be quiet! Eadmer, for heaven's sake, don't sit there like a lump of dough!"

"My lady—he's going mad again—"

"No, he isn't. But he may hurt himself—hold him down! Oh, Heaven bless us all—what can I do with two of 'em?"

"I'm mad, am I?" I shrieked. "St. Erne—the cross—oh, God! Milo, Milo!"

Eadmer grabbed me and held me down on the sheepskins; I felt him, but I did not see him. I saw other things. . .

"You ain't mad now, my lord," he said carefully, "but you was."

Ceredwin nursed me with as much care as if I had been something valuable. She had two sets of linen bandages, and she changed them every two days, washing the stained ones, which may seem overcareful, perhaps, to some. Her hands were light as foam, and I usually didn't feel anything until she came pretty close to the flesh. She had Eadmer handy to hold me down in case I started kicking, but I didn't, and he usually looked so sick by the time she uncovered the wound that she had to send him out anyhow. But the thing was healing, and so was I—unwilling, weak, wretched thing that I was. Once I swore at her and asked her to let me die and be done. She sat back on her heels again and regarded me with a cold eye.

"After all the trouble I've taken? I'll do no such thing." And she added something unladylike which I fear she had picked up from Eadmer.



NOW that the memories of Dun Cathach and Milo's death had come back to me, I was no pleasant company. I lay on my sheepskins, my face to the wall, my heart with the dead. She let me alone, and she must have ordered Eadmer to do the same. She did the cooking for us, and ground the meal for porridge on a small stone quern, and milked the cow that pastured in the wild thickets of our haunted island. Eadmer fished and trapped rabbits and went to Killanore at twilight when we needed anything; and moved me when I needed it, sweating big drops and breathing hard through his nose. Even in my misery of heart, I noticed that something seemed wrong with my legs—I couldn't move the right leg at all, and the left only feebly, as you do when your foot goes to sleep. And I thought that this was my punishment for what I had done to my comrades—in my young manhood to be maimed and helpless. In my despair I think I might have ended myself, except that I had been taught from boyhood that earned punishment had to be endured.

I lay sometimes and stared dull-eyed at Ceredwin, as she moved about our little cave. Not with the pleasure I had taken before my memory came back, but because she was there to look at. Her face, from which the last trace of childish roundness had gone, intent over cookpot or quern, brown from her long wanderings in sun and wind, with its steady eyes and firm-lipped mouth; her busy,

graceful hands; her braided amber hair, and the small shapely bare feet that the coarse patched gown revealed. Now and then she passed some remark at me, about how sick she was getting of rabbit stew, and how the cave roof was so low that she was going to go around hereafter with her chin on her chest, and Eadmer's bad luck with the fishing had lasted a week now. But no word of my disaster, or of the murders of the men who had given her shelter, no sigh, no lament. It made me angry at her, in a futile way. If she had spoken of them, though, I might have felt worse. Perhaps she knew this. I think she did. Now and then she would sing, softly to herself, the old songs of our Welsh hills.

We must have been living in the old grave on Inch-na-Droa for a month when one evening, when an autumn wind was rustling the fallen leaves outside, Eadmer came galloping up the path from the river.

"I've just seen Brother Teague," he gasped. "He met me—that abbot is back from Cashel. We've got to get my lord out of here!"

Ceredwin looked up from the porridge pot. "We can't move him yet," she said. I rose on my elbow, irritated—they didn't consult me.

"We've got to, my lady. That abbot ain't the kind to cross himself and run if he sees smoke rising on Inch-na-Droa. Poor old Brother Teague, he was terrible worried. He's got to lie, and say my lord's dead and buried—I've got him a shirt and a blanket here."

"I want to see Brother Teague, and thank him," I said. "And I want to see about Milo's—Milo's burial."

Ceredwin eyed me. "Brother Teague understands," she said. "There's no need for you to risk yourself to do the civil. And for—the other, we spoke of that, too. We've got to get out of here, I guess. Eadmer, get him dressed. How are we going to carry him?"

"I've got a kind of a horse tied across the river," grunted Eadmer.

I forded the river in Eadmer's arms, protesting bitterly all the way, but when he started to tie me onto the wretched old broken-kneed, sway-backed, half-blind, mangy son of a mare, I made so much noise that, to shut me up, he let me hang on to the ratty mane.

"I guess one masterpiece can ride another," I finished, "even with one leg and one arm."

Ceredwin, carrying the battered old cook-pot, looked at me and nodded, approvingly. She wrung out her wet gown and we started off, northward and east. Killanore Abbey is nearer to Dublin than to Wexford, and we were rather in a hurry. We passed by the Lake of Killanore in the last light—I had never seen it before of course, and it was an uncanny place—a dark sheet of still water, lying at the base of giant crags. On its southern

end, we could see the massed shapes of buildings, and a faint flicker of light—the abbey itself. I made a vow in my heart that if I lived, I would get back somehow, and finish my duty. I would thank Brother Teague for his wonderful kindness to my friends and to me, and I would find Milo's bones and see them decently buried. And if I had time, I would call on Abbot Aymon.

That was a difficult journey. They, Ceredwin and Eadmer, had become accustomed to fending for me as if I had been an idiot child, and they gave no heed to me when I protested about their recklessness. They stole a pig on one occasion, I know, and corn out of the stooks, and eggs out of somebody's byre—Ceredwin prided herself on this last. I might rage and storm, and I might as well have kept still. I tried not to give them any more trouble than I had to, but I was not fit to travel, really; I was helpless and sick, I could not walk at all, and my arm was giving me hell, although Ceredwin had hung it in a sling to ease me. The nights were damp and cold; we would huddle together wherever we had halted and doze and wake and doze again. We had to travel by day, for the way was unfamiliar, and as we hardly dared ask directions too often, we got lost, in bogs and thickets and rocky uplands. The sight of a ragged villain would send us scuttling. It was a miserable time, and the old nag's backbone was saving me in two, and once, when in an hour of watery sunlight, I looked down on Eadmer's head and saw how gray he was getting, I leaked tears like an old ale-jack.

By the time we had passed through what we later learned was the valley of Glendalough, we had grown reckless, all three. We plodded on, no matter if we came in sight of warriors in yellow shirts or other wretches like ourselves. We had to get to Dublin. Ceredwin and Eadmer carried huge bundles on their backs—grass, really, wrapped in their blankets—partly to hide their faces, partly to make us look like villains going to mill or market. But nobody paid us any heed, except a dull glance or a curse now and then, if we wandered into the path of mounted warriors. We saw nothing that looked Norman, and a sort of sick fear gripped us all, that we didn't need to explain.

And when at last we came to Dublin, and brazenly up to the south gate of the city, and I saw a large red-headed man-at-arms propped on his lance and blowing his nose like a horn, I could have kissed him. But I refrained. Strongbow's banner floated above the ramparts of the Castle—or, three chevrons, gules, with a label of five points, azure—and we had ended our journey.

"That's mighty good," Eadmer nodded at the banner. "Now, my lady, you can be took



We passed by the Lake of Killanore in the last light . . .

care of proper. I'll take you to Strongbow's lady."

"You will?" she demanded, in a fury, so that a tow-headed Dane stopped and stared at us. "I'll take care of myself, and you too!"

"No, you won't," he said. "Begging your pardon, my lady, we're inside Christian walls. You can't live with two bachelors. I ain't a-going to let you."

CHAPTER XI

DUBLIN WINTER

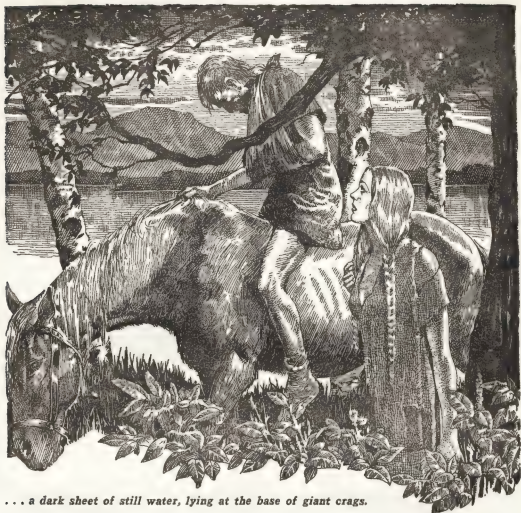


EADMER told me as much as he thought proper of the political situation in Ireland, and of affairs at Dun Cathach, where he had brought twenty good men the previous autumn, well equipped, and had had

the devil's own time getting them admitted. He said little about the massacre, but then Eadmer never did say much about the important things. The story of his search for me I had to worm out of him little by little, later on, and his emphasis lay on the way Madame Ceredwin had behaved, and not on his own mad risking of his life for my sake, and he never would tell about how he got the scar on his arm. "Piece of damn foolishness, my lord," was all.

He brought me to a place he had selected when he had wound up in Dublin before, after his unsuccessful searching, and before he had brought the bad news to the Convent of the Holy Veil. It was the loft over a chandler's shop, down by the waterfront.

"It ain't no palace, but it's private-like—a square-head keeps the shop, but he won't bother us none."



... a dark sheet of still water, lying at the base of giant crags.

"And will give us his loft for pure love, eh?"

"No, my lord, I got money." He patted the rope belt about his disreputable carcass. He had, too—he had scoured some out of my uncle when he had recruited the men, and how he worked it, I wish I knew—and he had also borrowed some in a dark lane from a Bristol money-lender he disapproved of, just before sailing for Ireland. He had some trouble with Ceredwin, despite his firm speech about bachelors, for Ceredwin was horrified at the idea of being presented to Strongbow and his lady in her rags and bare feet. So Eadmer sighed, unbelted, and bought her some second-hand garments in the market place, and Strongbow was delighted to see her, wanting a Norman lady-in-waiting for Aoife, and Aoife—well, she always was a darling, and the record of a lady's father made no

difference to her—she liked company. Nobody seemed to know or care what had become of Sir Robert de Morreise, but the talk was that he was no longer in Ireland.

Well, Eadmer carried me up the narrow stair to the chandler's loft, settled me as comfortably as possible, and went out to fix up the horse, which he worked off on a Danish peddler before he ever reached the market.

Sometimes I'm sorry I've sworn to tell the truth in this narrative. When I think how I behaved that winter, my face still heats up. Misty autumn deepened into foggy winter, and I finally could drag myself to the loft window with the help of a home-made crutch, and stare across the masts in the harbor to the hill of Howth beyond—then I would drag myself back to the fire and stare at that for a while. Eadmer snarled at me, and dosed me with one vile concoction after an-

other, and tried to get me to eat, poor old lad, patient as an angel. I was miserable, safe in the comfortable loft, as I had not been miserable on the road, in peril of my life, because I had plenty of time and nothing else to do but be miserable. I had been young and lusty and ambitious, and almost overnight, it seemed to me (because of the gap in my memory), I had become a cripple—a man spoiled for life, and fit for nothing but a monastery.

I gloomed around, staring into the fire, aware of the dull ache in my arm, and the pain in my back, and the queer cold lifelessness of my legs, especially the right one. I would curse Eadmer for his fussing to keep me warm and easy, and when he'd go off to get us something to eat, I would sit and argue with the Lord, pointing out that since He'd let me be marred for life, He ought to finish the job and let me die. I would shed tears. I was a mess of bitter resentment and helpless anguish and entire selfishness.

That was my main trouble. All my thoughts were turned in on myself. I almost forgot St. Erne, I almost forgot Milo, only envying them because they were dead and out of it. My feelings about the Mac Breagh, and his brother the abbot, had subsided into a dull resentment like ashes that only glowed when breathed upon. I forgot about Ceredwin, forgot to ask if she were content at Strongbow's court. I never considered the trouble I gave Eadmer with my moping and my peevish shoving aside of good food. In short, I was all wound up in the woes of Brian Fitz-Brian, like a hound in a bramble thicket.

Eadmer wanted to let Strongbow know of my presence in Dublin, but of course I refused.

"Well, my lord, I could tell Fitz-Stephen—he's here for the Christmas feasting, and he would be awful mad if he knew you was a-hiding out here like a badger in his hole."

"Tell Fitz-Stephen, and I'll cut my throat," I said. "I think I will anyhow."

"That's a mortal sin, my lord," he addressed me sternly. "And you left half your porridge. Eat that up now, or I'll feed it to you."

I told him what he could do with his porridge, and threw myself down on the bed.



UNTIL a week after Epiphany. . .

It was a dark afternoon, and the rain had fallen all day. Eadmer had gone out, after leaving me wrapped up in blankets in the chair by the fire. Our loft had become a regular solar chamber from Eadmer's efforts—he had caulked cracks, mended floor and thatch, and fixed the hearth to draw well. I had not questioned Eadmer as to where he might be going—I wasn't interested. I sat moping by

the fire until it began to dull, and I knew I should poke it up, and I wondered peevishly why Eadmer didn't hurry back and do it. And then I heard a sharp rapping at the door.

I jumped out of my skin, almost. Then, resentful and scared, too, I huddled back into my blankets and kept mum. The knocking persisted. I finally growled, "Come in," and then realized that I had bolted the door shortly after Eadmer had left, in case the chandler—who was a chatty lad, and liked to visit when business was dull—should come upstairs. With a groan, I reached for my crutch, and dragged myself to the door.

"Who's there?" I demanded, my hand on the bolt.

"Me," said a familiar voice. "If you don't mind. I'm wet through."

I thrust back the bolt. "Sorry to keep you waiting, madame," I said, all of a shake. "I can't move very fast."

Ceredwin slipped inside, dripping like a mermaid, in a dark-hooded mantle. I could just see the whiteness of her face and the gleam of her hair. I stood and stared at her, too witless to help her out of the wet mantle. She unfastened the clasp herself, and walked over to the fire, where she spread the garment over a stool to dry. I had forgotten all my manners—I was heading back to my chair, when I did recollect myself enough to subside on the other stool.

"What are you doing here?" I asked rudely. "There's a chair."

She had been arranging the folds of her gown, a modest dark brown with gay embroidery at the neck and at the hem of the wide sleeves. I noticed that it seemed a bit too tight above the waist, recalled that I was nearly a monk now and shouldn't notice anything of the sort, looked down and saw her foot, in a shoe of stamped leather, and a handsome red stocking decking the slender ankle . . . so I looked sternly at the fire. So that when she removed her shoes and set them to dry, and stretched out her toes to the blaze and wiggled them comfortably, I was irritated.

"Don't undress in here," I said. "This isn't Queen Aoife's robing room."

"I know that," she said coolly. "It's raining, and I don't want to catch my death of cold. Do you want me to go?"

"Naturally not, now you're here," I said graciously. I did not dare look at her, because she was so beautiful. Older than she had looked in the grave by Killanore, and the slender hands no longer brown. I had had one glimpse of her as she removed her mantle, and it was in vain that I sat glowering at the fire, my left arm held carefully behind my back. . . . I saw her face amid the flames, I saw it on the boards of the floor—I saw it everywhere. I

would be seeing it on the gray stone flags of St. Waldeve's cloister, when I got there at last, with the world and its foolishness left behind me forever—"But I was curious as to why you should come calling on a day like this. You'd better have a good reason or Eadmer will be upset."

She thrust the wandering curl sternly back into place.

"How are you feeling, Sir Brian?"

"I'll do," I said, "for such as I am."

"How's your arm?"

"It's pretty well healed. Aches in this sort of weather, though."

"Let me see."

I held it behind me. "It's not for a court-lady's eyes."

"I'm sorry I put on my best gown, if that's the way you're going to behave." Her voice was stern, but if I had dared look at her, I think she might have been smiling, and that I couldn't bear. "Come along, I want to see it, it's important. I was your surgeon before ever I was a court-lady."

My bad humor persisted. I disregarded courtesy and showed the thing to her, my eyes still on the fire.

"Yes," she said thoughtfully, her fingers light as flowers. "Um. I did get all the threads out, after all. I was worried. . . Brian, you would be surprised to see the number of Irish chiefs and kinglets who come every day to do homage to the earl. And some of them would be surprised if they knew you were alive."

I started to say something bitter about being only half alive, but the words died before they ever came to my lips. A throb of pain shot through my arm, that I had carefully replaced behind my back, and I saw, beyond the fire, the red flaring of torches on savage faces. The loft chamber was silent, save for the snapping of the fire.

"The Mac Breagh," I said, after a while. "Ceredwin! Did he see you? My God! We'll get you out of here—you can stay in the loft, and I'll see that Eadmer gets some sort of a craft with a sail and oars, or—"

"No, no—I—"

"Damn it all! Why didn't you say this before? Sitting here mauling about my health and the weather—"

"You mauler yourself, messire. Do you think I'm an utter fool? Of course he didn't see me! I just thought you might be interested. He was wearing a fine hauberk of mail, and a silver cross around his neck."



I SAID nothing. Too many wild ideas were charging through my head, routing the gray vapors that had hung in it so long. I stretched out my right hand. It was bony

and white and full of veins, like an old man's.

I clenched it once or twice, and silence fell between us again. A long silence. She broke it at last.

"I must go now."

"Did they send a servant with you?"

"Don't talk like Eadmer. Of course I'm escorted." She bent, and put on her shoes. Then she stood upright, and I rose too, catching at the table's edge to support myself. I had to look at her. I couldn't help her with her mantle, of course. She lifted it, and flung it around her shoulders. Then she spoke briskly.

"Sir Brian, I want to apologize."

"Whatever for?" I stared blankly.

"For the way I behaved to you on the road to Kileeda. I was a silly little prig to make so much fuss about a kiss . . . Are you going to enter St. Waldeve's?"

"I—I suppose so. That, or another—I—"

Her voice deepened, softened. "Then probably I won't see you again, Sir Brian." She looked up at me, looked away. "Would you like to—to take the kiss now, Sir Brian?"

"No!" I shouted.

"Good-bye, Sir Brian," she whispered. And before I could move or stir, she came at me, and wound her arms softly around my neck, and drew herself close to me, close, so that I felt the leap of her heart, the soft firmness of breast and thigh . . . she laid her head on my breast and looked up at me out of half-closed eyes. Sweat sprang out on my forehead. I couldn't move, or I would fall. I couldn't draw her close, nor yet shove her away, for my one hand was busy holding me up by the table edge. The left arm I held stiffly behind me so that it wouldn't touch her. She had grown much taller. She began to draw my head down, slowly, while the violet-blue eyes glinted at me through their long lashes.

Then she kissed me, on the mouth, lingeringly, while her eyes closed their delicate lids, and the long fringes lay on her cheeks, black and soft like butterfly wings. She sighed faintly, and the clinging lips drew away.

"All good luck to you, Sir Brian," she breathed. "The tide is turning."

She released me, and was gone. The door closed behind her, and the bolt rattled loosely.

I fell onto the stool, wiping my forehead with my sleeve.

"G-good God," I said aloud. "That was the damndest performance I ever—now who's been putting ideas into—court ways—never learned that at any convent— And what did she mean by—damn these women, I can't make 'em out—and she used to be so hoity-toity, keep-your-paws-off. She felt sorry for me. That was it. Um. But it didn't feel like—whoo!"

I wiped my brow again. New life went gushing and roaring through my veins, like brook water in spring when you clear away a barrier of rock and weed.



"Good-bye, Sir Brian," she whispered. And before I could move or stir, she came at me and wound her arms softly around my neck.

Eadmer came in with a basket while I was squinting at myself in our copper basin and scraping carefully at my right cheek.

"What are you doing, my lord?" he demanded.

"Shaving," I said. I looked like a scarecrow that's been left out in the autumn rains. My face was waxy-pale and hollowed out under

the cheekbones and temples, and the deep lines between my eyes and around my mouth made me look old as a full-blown bard. My hair was streaked with gray. "They used to call me the handsomest man in Ireland." I heard Eadmer swallow. "You fetched her, didn't you?"

"No, my lord, I never—"

"Yes, you did. Don't give me any lip. Damn your impudence. I've been giving you a lot of trouble, haven't I? Well, I'll have to give you a bit more. Have we money enough to hire some horses?"

"'Osse?" he croaked, letting his accent slip.

"Yes. We're going back to Dun Cathach. Little arms practice, that's all, and don't gawk like that—all I want is a bit of privacy. Get off those wet duds, and get dry—I don't want you sneezing your head off tomorrow. How about the horses?"

"I can get 'em, I—"

"And another thing. Tomorrow, I want you to go to the castle, and ask for Madame Ceredwin. Tell her thanks for what she gave me."

"She gave you . . . ?"

"Yes. Tell her I understand, and I'll do my best, and I'll see her later. Why aren't you getting out of those clothes?"

He stood staring at me, his face working. Then he uttered the vulgarest oath I ever heard, and began stripping off his clothes.

We rode out of Dublin the next morning in a drizzling cold rain, mounted on two stout nags with mouths like iron. It was very awkward at first to handle the reins with my right hand, but I said to myself, this is just one of the things you've got to learn, and by the time we were climbing the Wicklow hills, I had begun to catch on. And although my right leg dangled helplessly, I could keep in the saddle. Eadmer was worried for fear I'd catch cold, but I didn't. As a matter of fact, I haven't had a day's sickness, barring hunting and tourney accidents, from that day to this.



THE winter of '71 passed quietly enough at Dun Cathach. We had plenty to do, and time to do it in, and we kept busy. We increased the height of our outer wall, and built a gate-house. Likewise we built a chapel between the horse-barn and the armory; small, but well-designed, and built under the eye of a mason I hired from Wexford. While he was there, I had him do something about our chimney in the hall, so we got less smoke and more heat. I was rather proud of the results, and proud, too, of the way the men had taken charge under Ebba's rule. They had maintained good watch, collected the rents and behaved as prudently as possible. They had had one brush with a cattle-lifting party of Mac Carthys, and a tangle with some of the Mac Breaghs in the hills, but nothing serious—the wet winter prob-

ably had something to do with it. St. Erne had given each man a generous parcel of land, and they had taken over the grants of the dead. I felt that this ownership ought to be confirmed. Of course the Dun Cathach lands belonged by right to St. Erne's eldest boy, but he was a child, back in Wales, and since Fitz-Stephen would be his suzerain, I thought I ought to go to Wexford and see Fitz-Stephen about it.

It shows you how busy I had been, that I never once thought of how I was a changed man until I got to The Crag, where Fitz-Stephen's new stockade was rising high above the river Slane. A momentary hesitation made me check Boru's reins, and Eadmer looked at me suspiciously. Then I thought, what the hell, get it over with, and our party of six rode down the slope to the ford, through the icy water of early April and up the hill to the Crag, where men swarmed like ants, and the air was ringing with the song of mallets and chisels and saws, and men bawled orders that nobody seemed to give any heed to, and I saw Fitz-Stephen himself trying to get his new gate to hang straight by dangling his weight from it and swearing. The walls were stick and stone and wattle, stuck together hit or miss, and I felt rather smug about Dun Cathach. But we were challenged sharply by well-armed sentries. When Fitz-Stephen saw us, he dropped from the gate and came running. Halfway to us, though, he stopped short and stared open-mouthed.

"Fitz-Brian, by God! Ain't you dead?"

"Not me," I answered, bowing politely. "Damaged, but not dead." I felt uneasy. Fitz-Stephen was the first man of my own rank I had encountered since the massacre at Dun Cathach. What would he think when he saw me walk, one-sided like a crab, dragging my bad leg, and saw my arm, that I was hiding in my mantle? I dismounted, and hobbled up to him; and after one brief stare he ran up and embraced me, and thumped my back and swore that I was unkillable, and the mere sight of me made him feel better about our chances, and dinner was just ready to come off the fire.

"Not that we've got any peacocks to set before you," he explained. "Something's gone wrong, Fitz-Brian. No supply ships have come from Bristol since last autumn, and I'm getting worried. We can get along, far as food's concerned, for a while—we just eat grub—but my God, you can't hold down the damned country forever with a handful of men! I've sent for reinforcements, but we've heard nothing of 'em."

"Don't tell me that Wales has stopped breeding men with a taste for a fight," I said.

"It's the king," he interrupted. "He's put an embargo on all shipping to Ireland."

"For God's love, why?"

"And what's more, he's ordered us all home to give an account of ourselves."

"Say it over and say it slow," I implored. "Why, we had a blessing from the Pope himself, and King Dermot had the royal permit to collect men for the business."

"Don't you get it?" Fitz-Stephen gestured me to my seat at the high table—two split logs on trestles—and the mess sergeant set a scraggly haunch of venison before Fitz-Stephen, who began to carve it up as the hungry knights and men-at-arms swarmed to their places. "We were too damned successful."

"Eh? Oh—I see."

"Sure. If we'd mostly got killed, without any gains made, that would be one thing. But you know, we've won the east coast of Ireland from Dublin to Waterford, and King Henry don't like it one bit. Well, I'm loyal, pretty loyal, and so are the others. But we didn't give up all we'd won and crawl home to get tossed into some royal dungeon. When the ships didn't come last autumn, Strongbow sent Raymond le Gros to Aquitaine to explain how loyal we all were, and how we regarded ourselves as the king's good vassals. Well, at Christmas, le Gros came home on a herring boat. The king wouldn't even give him an audience. So the earl shipped off Mountmaurice. He's the slimy sort of lad who gets places around a court."

"That's nice news," I said, "and what if Hasculf and his pals decide to have a try at a raid on Dublin?"

Fitz-Stephen grinned sourly through his red moustaches and drew his forefinger across his throat. "Look, Fitz-Brian. I've got to finish this castle, such as it is. My men are working day and night, hauling dirt and rocks with one hand and shoving off the Wexford rebels with the other. You're my nearest neighbor. If there's trouble in Dublin, will you take a party there for me? I promised Strongbow I'd—"

"I—" I hesitated. "You know I'm crippled?"

"You don't limp in the saddle. My good God, we need every man we can get."

"I've lost my left hand, too—had you heard?"

"Yes, just now, from one of your men. It's a bloody shame. But it ain't your sword hand, is it? Look. If these Danes should attack Dublin, and the Irish cut loose too—well, there'll be fun and games for all. Damn this damned blockade. Damn spies and statecraft anyhow. Thank God we still have King Dermot on our side."

After that visit, the quiet of the countryside seemed oddly ominous.

On a morning in early May, I was on watch in our new gate-house when I saw a rider come spurring over the hill from the north. My heart stopped; I felt odd and cold, and I thought, "Here it is."

The rider was Art O'Gallin. He had come to tell us that King Dermot had died at Ferns. We stood alone in the hostile land, with every man's hand against us.





The major fell backward,
planting the seat of his
breeches squarely in a tub
of hot soapy water.

CHOW-HOUND

By

EDWARD ARTHUR DOLPH

ILLUSTRATED BY ELMER WEXLER



THEY say that every dog has his day—and Python, the mongrel chow mascot of Battery G on Corregidor, certainly had his! The major will never forget that day, and neither will the men of Battery G of the old Fifty-ninth Artillery—or at least those of them who left the regiment long before the tragic spring of '42 befell the Rock. And that is why, whenever veterans of Battery G meet in days and places far removed from there, they raise their glasses and, in voices choked with mirth, and affectionate remembrance cry, "Here's to Python! May his canine soul rest in peace!"

All, that is, except the major. But, though he raise no glass in toast, he, too, will not forget! No, the major certainly will not forget!

How Python came to the Rock, and the place of his former dwelling, no one knew. But the night that he attached himself to Battery G will never be forgotten. It was the night after pay-day, and old Maloney, whose frequent and intimate association with John Barleycorn had long since earned him the permanent rank of buck private, staggered wearily up the hill



from the midnight boat from Manila. Drooping with the weight of nearly thirty years of service and many libations of Ayala gin, the little old man pulled nervously at his ratty mustache and searched with watery eyes for possible non-commissioned officers to be avoided. Then, instinctive as a homing pigeon if not as direct, he wove his way cautiously through the darkened barracks, past long rows of iron cots and sleeping men, to find the one spot in all the world that belonged to him alone—his bed.

Behind him, noiseless except for an occasional click of toenails on the concrete floor, a medium-sized, reddish-brown dog with tail screwed grotesquely up over his rump and one good ear standing pertly at attention, padded softly at his heels.

With a sigh of infinite relief old Maloney dropped wearily to his bunk and to sleep. With equal directness his canine shadow crawled under the bed, circled once or twice in the age-old preliminary of his kind, and collapsed with an audible grunt of satisfaction.

Not a man in the squadron had witnessed that triumphant stealing into barracks except old Dunham, whose bunk was across the aisle from Maloney. Being one of a little group whose pay had been recently forfeited by verdict of a summary court, he had just returned from a clandestine gathering where the cheapness of a beverage was more important than its quality; consequently, he was not too inclined to trust his own eyes. For a minute he lay resting on one elbow and staring at the dim brown shape curled up under Maloney's bed. Then his drink-inflamed imagination ran riot. Suddenly he flopped back with a yell and pulled the blanket up over his head, moaning and bewailing his over-indulgence and certain that the "D.T.'s" were upon him again.

Instantly the barracks came awake. Men leaped out of bed or sat up sleepily, cursing the disturbance. Huge, red-faced Sergeant Casey, in charge of quarters, rushed in, flashlight in hand.

"What the devil's goin' on in here?" he demanded. Then, hearing the hysterical Dunham moaning and whimpering under his blankets, Casey strode over and yanked the bedding back in disgust.

"So!" he roared angrily. "Ye've been at it again! Drinkin' the alcohol out o' the hydraulic jacks instead o' buyin' a bottle o' dacent liker!"

"Snakes!" screamed Dunham. "A python! Oh, take him away! Don't let him get me!"

"Snakes!" snorted Casey. "Pythons this time, is it? Well, it's Saint Peter ye'll be seein' damned soon if ye don't lay off that stuff, me lad! Turn on the lights, somebody! One of you non-coms call the ambulance and we'll ship him up to the hospital so the rest of us can get some sleep!"

The lights clicked on.

Casey pulled the moaning and blinking Dunham to a sitting position.

"There, Dunham," he said a little more kindly. "The snakes are all gone now, me lad."

"No! No!" yelled Dunham, covering his face with his hands. "The python! It's still there, under Maloney's bed! Oh, take it away! Take it away!" Shuddering with horror, he flopped back and pulled the blanket over his head again.



ALL eyes turned toward Maloney's bed. Sprawled in deep sleep, its owner lay undisturbed by all the turmoil about him. Beneath the bunk, growling and blinking uncertainly in the sudden flood of light, lay the mongrel chow, his one good eye flitting searchingly from one to another of the half-naked men.

A chorus of surprised comments greeted the bewildered and truculent canine. Then someone started to laugh.

"Python!" he howled. "Some python! A python with four legs!"

"Hey, Dunham!" shouted another, jerking the blankets off him again. "Your python's got four legs. See him?" And he pulled the half-crazed man to a sitting position and pointed.

"See him, Dunham? Your python's only a dog. Just another of old Maloney's strays!"

For a minute Dunham stared with unbelieving eyes. Then the wild look faded slowly from his face. He slumped back on his bunk whispering weakly, "Oh, thank God! Thank God! I thought they were after me again!"

It is not important that all efforts to eject the dog from barracks that night, or even to dislodge him from his place beneath old Maloney's bed, were futile; nor are all the impolite things that the first sergeant said the next morning as he booked the old soldier for his regular pay-day interview with the battery commander of any consequence now. What is important is that the dog stayed—that somewhere from the depths of his frustrated soul old Maloney summoned a sincerity and eloquence in pleading that touched a responsive chord in the heart of the captain—that somewhere from the recesses of memory the captain recalled the loneliness and homesickness of his own regimented days as an enlisted man and granted the forlorn little old soldier permission to keep his newly acquired and battered pet.

What is important, too, is that from that night on the dog knew no other name but "Python." Accepting the name and emulating his namesake, the old dog wrapped himself irresistibly around the hearts of all the men of Battery G.

All that is, except those whole legs were encased in leather. For the officers never quite

won his acceptance. For all legs wrapped in woolen leggings he had tolerance, and for those of Battery G downright affection; but for those dressed in leather puttees or shiny boots he had little use.

There were some who insisted that all this was merely the natural and instinctive feeling of Python for members of his own class. On the other hand, there were also those who hinted darkly that this attitude of Python was encouraged by secret and unpleasant contact with certain boots and leggings that had been purloined from the quarters of their owners by unscrupulous "strikers" whose duty it was to care for the equipment of various officers of the regiment.

Be that all as it may, the result was the same. Many a surreptitious crap game came to a sudden but timely end as Python's low growl in the hallway warned of the approach of snooping owners of leather-bedecked legs; and many a carefully planned "drop" inspection of barracks was frustrated by the timely rumble in the old dog's throat.

Through it all the officers, wise in the ways of soldiers, knowing that Python was a safety valve for repressed emotions and better for morale than a dozen chaplains, smiled tolerantly at the dog's insults and pretended not to notice the amused grins on the faces of their men. All, that is, except the major.

Battery G and the entire Third Battalion were sunk in the depths of gloomy apprehension. "Roaring Bill" Knight, their profane but beloved battalion commander, had sailed for the States on the last transport, and the next was to bring tight-lipped little "Fussy" Fink who had just finished a four-year detail in the Inspector General's Department. Knowing that the snoopy martinet's services had been far more appreciated as an inspector than they ever would be as commander of a battalion of the line, the men fervently and vociferously hoped that by some miracle, plus a reshuffling of officers, he would not be assigned to their battalion. Now they knew that their hopes were in vain. Major Fink had arrived on the Rock the night before and already had been assigned to command the Third Battalion. Leaving Python and the kitchen detail to greet the new major, Battery G marched soberly off to drill.



HIS stomach filled with the choicest scraps that the mess sergeant could find, Python was returning from his morning stroll. Down the three-hundred-yard length of the concrete barracks that housed the regiment he padded slowly, pausing only to interview an occasional palm or papaya tree, and ignoring the assorted mascots in front of the various batteries. A chattering monkey scurried up a

tree as far as his chain would permit, remembering painfully the day he had experimentally yanked that curled-up tail. A shrewish old parrot perched in front of one of the batteries hurled invective at Python's battered head, but his canine dignity was undisturbed. With a wary glance at the disreputable old tomcat dozing on a full stomach in front of F Battery's kitchen, he continued on his way, stopping only to listen with visible pleasure to the profane terms of affection that accompanied some soldier's gentle scratching of his unscarred ear.

Meanwhile, back of barracks, along the road which ran past the garbage stands, a different scene was taking place. Notebook and pencil in hand, Major Fink was stopping at each screened inclosure and making voluminous notes after lifting lids from cans, testing the fit of doors, and examining the condition of the paint. Any other newly assigned battalion commander would have called at the battery offices before beginning a first inspection, but Fussy Fink didn't do things that way.

Having completed his survey of G Battery's garbage stand, Fink carefully pocketed his notebook and started around the end of barracks, smiling with grim satisfaction.

Meanwhile Python had also reached the end of barracks. Dreaming of the fresh bone which usually awaited his return from these morning jaunts, he quickened his pace and started around the corner to his favorite spot under the garbage stand. Suddenly he was confronted by a strange and highly polished pair of dark brown boots, gingerly picking their way across a patch of wet and soapy concrete in front of the kitchen door. Startled by the abrupt intrusion of these strange leather legs into his thoughts and domain, and outraged by their evident intention to invade his kitchen, Python snarled his objection. The owner of the legs, intent on avoiding various soapy puddles, jumped backward in frightened surprise and lashed out at the dog with one foot. Unfortunately, his other foot came down on the wet and slippery strands of a G.I. mop, the handle of which leaned against one of the concrete posts of the porch. The mop skidded, the foot resting upon it joined its mate in mid-air, and their owner fell backward with a yell, planting the seat of his stiffly starched khaki breeches squarely in a small wooden tub of hot water.

"Unh!" For a second the startled officer sat there, the breath jarred completely out of his lungs. Then, as the hot water soaked through the seat of his starched breeches and the snarling dog started stiff-legged toward him, he recovered his breath in one mighty gasp of pain and alarm.

"Help!" he yelled, pushing frantically at the sides of the tub and flailing his heels at the angry Python.

He tried desperately to pull his tightly wedged bottom from the hot water in which it was slowly being parboiled, but to no avail.

"Ow! Help! Get me out of here! Take that dog away! Take him away, I say!"

At that instant the mess sergeant and old Maloney came charging out of the kitchen like a pair of frightened bulls. The screen door, nearly leaving its hinges, struck the side of the tub so violently that it overturned and skidded the major across the porch in a cascade of hot suds. Slammed up against one of the concrete posts, the bedraggled officer came to rest on his hands and knees, his tub-encased bottom sticking up in the air like a camel's hump.

Maloney grabbed the excited dog just in time to keep him from taking a piece out of the major's leg.

"You clumsy ox!" the mess sergeant began angrily. "Why in the devil don't you—"

Abruptly the words died in his throat as the significance of those boots suddenly dawned upon him. He noted the officer's cord on the bedraggled campaign hat lying in a nearby puddle. With a bound he was at the major's side, tugging at the stubborn tub.

"I beg your pardon, sir! I didn't recognize you. I didn't know—I—"

Confused apologies poured from his abashed lips as he yanked the offending tub from the major's rear.

Fussy Fink rose slowly to his feet, shaking with anger. His blazing eyes burned into the stammering sergeant.

"You didn't know!" he mocked venomously. "I wouldn't expect you to know! Any man that permits conditions like these around a battery kitchen couldn't be expected to have that much intelligence! There'll be a new mess sergeant in this battery just as soon as I see your battery commander! But there's one thing you'd better know!"

His arm, forefinger extended, suddenly shot out toward Python.

"Who owns that dog?" The words crackled like angry lightning.

The two enlisted men glanced apprehensively at Python who still voiced his disapproval of the unfortunate mayor in low rumbling growls.

"Why, sir," said the mess sergeant, "he sort of belongs to all of us. He's the mascot of Battery G."

"Mascot!" snorted Major Fink. "That flea-bitten mongrel? Well, get rid of him, do you understand? Mascot or no mascot, I'll have no vicious cur around any batteries in my battalion! See that he's disposed of at once!"

Old Maloney was panic stricken.

"Please, sir," he pleaded, screwing up his courage in his pet's defense, "Python isn't really a bad dog, sir. The battery commander knows

he isn't. He said we could keep him, sir. And Major Knight said it was all right, sir."

"That will do!" snapped Fussy. "Major Knight is not commanding this battalion now. That dog is a menace. If I find him around here tomorrow, he'll be shot if I have to shoot him myself!"

Picking up his soaked campaign hat he stamped off toward his quarters, angry and bedraggled as the proverbial wet hen.

Python, however, was not disposed of, nor did he relinquish his post as mascot of Battery G. He may not have possessed the nine lives of his dearest enemy, the old tomcat of Battery F, but in the one life allotted to him he had made many friends in the right places. Moreover, the grapevine telegraph works fast in a regiment in garrison. Within an hour everyone from the colonel to the newest recruit was chuckling over the latest episode in Python's colorful career.



AT NOON the imperative notes of Officers' Call blared through the regimental area and the officers gathered at headquarters for their daily conference with the regimental commander. Carrying the world on his shoulders and a new hate in his heart, Fussy Fink appeared punctually among them. After he had formally introduced the new major to the other officers, the colonel, a big, soft-spoken man, outlined his plans for the coming Island Defense Maneuvers.

"Any questions, gentlemen?" he asked when he had finished.

There were none.

"Anything else before we dismiss?" asked the colonel.

"Yes, sir. I have a matter to take up," said Major Fink with the air of a man about to put the world back on its correct orbit.

"I'd like to comment on the practice of keeping vicious dogs as battery mascots in this regiment!"

All eyes turned toward the major. Every officer had already heard the story from his first sergeant, but such was their discipline that not a sign betrayed their secret mirth. Now their eyes danced with pleased anticipation. They loved their colonel, and they loved his quiet way of setting upstarts back on their heels.

"Meaning—Python, of Battery G?" asked the colonel, pleasantly.

"Yes, sir, Python—if that's his name," replied the major, flushing slightly under the concerted stares. "That ugly cur must be disposed of. He's an outrage and a menace to good discipline."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," the colonel protested gently. "Old Python is really an asset. You ought to see what he's done for Battery G.

A year ago they were the tail-enders in regimental rating, and now they've had the Efficiency Pennant for the last six months straight. They're so afraid we'll ban the dog that they work overtime at drill and barracks police so we'll let him stay. Even old Maloney has stayed sober for three pay-days hand running. No, Major, Python's almost as valuable as the sky-pilot here."

And he smiled affably at Chaplain Stiles.

"That may be, sir," replied the major. "But I prefer other methods for bringing men to heel!"

The colonel's blue eyes took on a steely hue.

"We don't bring men to heel in this regiment!" he said sharply. "We lead them! Keep your heeling methods for dogs!"

The major flushed more deeply, but the bit was in his teeth.

"Meaning Python, sir?" he said with near insolence.

Tiny muscles bulged at the hinges of the colonel's jaws. His eyes were cold blue ice.

"Fink," he said sternly, "if you try any of your heeling methods in the Third Battalion, I'll have you transferred out of this regiment! And as for Python, I've a hundred pesos that says you can't bring him to heel if I give you two months to try it!"

For a minute the major paused uncertainly. The first day in his new regiment and he was definitely off on the wrong foot! His pride, however, permitted no turning back.

"Very well, sir," he said stonily. "I shall obey your orders and I shall also accept your bet!"

And he passed over a hundred peso bill to the adjutant.

The colonel quietly reached for his wallet and counted a hundred pesos into the adjutant's hand.

"That's all, gentlemen," he said.

The officers clicked their heels, raised their hands smartly in salute, and departed for their quarters, seething with indignation at the upstart in their midst.

Once again the grapevine showed its efficiency. Before nightfall there wasn't a buck private in the regiment who didn't glory in Python's reprieve and gleefully anticipate the outcome of the wager between the colonel and the new major. And there wasn't one of them who wouldn't have bet his entire next year's pay on the battered old mascot of Battery G.

Now it must be said for the major that his efforts were elaborate and determined. Whatever else might be said about him, no one could ever accuse him of half-hearted effort in any endeavor he undertook. Moreover, he was also painfully aware that a thousand men now keenly and confidently awaited his complete humiliation.

"Well, so be it!" he thought grimly. "I'll

tame that dog or my name isn't Fink! No matter what it takes, I'll win this bet if it's the last thing I ever do! We'll see who laughs last!"



FORTIFIED by pride and resolution, the major embarked craftily upon his campaign. To Maloney and the mess sergeant he stiffly explained that, in deference to the

colonel's wishes, he was placing Python on two months' probation.

"If he behaves himself and mends his ways," he said pompously, "I may allow him to remain. But I'll permit no foolishness, you understand? His viciousness must be curbed!"

Having thus compromised his harsh declaration of death or banishment for old Python, the major set to work in earnest. In his pockets he carried scraps from his own table and the most expensive dog biscuits, which he slyly offered to his canine adversary. But Python would have none of them. When some particularly appetizing morsel momentarily tempted his palate he looked beyond them at those dark brown boots and memories of their flailing heels dispelled his weakness.

Now, there is a military maxim that for every offense there is a defense. In other words, there is an Achilles heel in every man and beast. Python's Achilles heel was fish. He loved fish. He doted on it. So did Major Fink.

Up from the barrio of San José, down near the boat dock, came the major one afternoon on the four o'clock trolley car that groaned and squealed its way up the steep grades and around the hairpin curves. Alighting at the Middleside station, he headed for Battery G kitchen and his afternoon cup of coffee. Other officers might gather at the Club and throw dice for their tea-time cocktails, but not the major.

Jealously clutching a damp paper package out of which protruded the tail of a magnificent fish which the master of the mine planter down at the dock had given him, Fussy strode along, thinking of the fine fish dinner his Chinese cook would prepare after he had enjoyed his afternoon tippie of strong G.I. coffee.

Near the door Python was dozing in the slanting rays of the dying sun. He aroused himself disgustedly as the major approached, growling his angry disapproval of the booted legs that had disturbed his siesta.

The major stopped. He was not a man to forget his objective. Persistence was the very stuff of which he was made.

"Here, boy!" he said, snapping his fingers. "Come Python! That's a good dog!"

Python snarled a contemptuous canine oath.

"Here boy!" coaxed the major, advancing warily. "Come on old man. I won't hurt you."

"You're darned right you won't!" the old dog's growl seemed to say.

Suddenly the rumble died in the dog's throat. He lifted his head and sniffed. He sniffed again. The stiffness flowed out of his body like water. A dreamy look came to his eyes and an expression of ineffable pleasure stole over his battered face. Drawn by an irresistible magnet, he slowly approached the major.

"Well, I'll be—" began the major. Then the reason for Python's capitulation dawned on the alert little man. Quick to seize his advantage, he dangled the paper-encased fish before the enraptured old canine. Backing through the swinging screen door of the kitchen and mouthing terms of endearment, he reached the freshly scrubbed meat block. Seizing a cleaver from the adjoining rack, he chopped off a generous portion of the fish's tail. Holding the tempting morsel well above the dog's head with one hand, he boldly scratched its one good ear with the other. There was no growl of protest. The dog's eyes were glued on the piece of fish. The major was in an ecstasy of delight. Scratching the dog's ears and patting his back, he led him to the door where, with a final triumphant pat on his head, he gave him his reward.

Delighted with his success, Fussy hurried back to the huge coffee urns on one of the ranges in the rear of the kitchen. Chatting affably with the dumbfounded cooks, he downed two steaming mugs of bitter black coffee. Then he engaged the mess sergeant in a lengthy discussion of the best way of serving certain kinds of tropical fish.

His stomach filled with good coffee, his heart warmed by his sudden success with Python, and his thoughts dwelling pleasantly on visions of a baked fish dinner, the major walked back to the meat block to retrieve his precious fish. Suddenly he stopped, hardly believing his eyes. His fish was nowhere in sight. He swung half around toward the cooks, a sharp question on his lips. Then he spied the damp brown wrapping paper on the floor beside the block, and a wet trail running from it across the floor to the door.

In two angry bounds the major was outside. There, a dozen feet away, glaring at him with his one good eye and snarling jealously over the skeleton of the once beautiful fish, stood Python, boldly defying him to do something about it. For a second Fink stood poised on the very verge of kicking the living daylight out of the insolent old mutt. It was not his own good judgment that saved him from that fatal error.

"Tenshun!"

The major rocked back on his heels as half a dozen lounging soldiers leaped to attention at Sergeant Casey's command. His startled glance took in the situation at once. This was no time for a display of temper that could only make him look ridiculous again.

"At ease, men!"

The major's arm rose to return their rigid salutes. Long years of discipline had made a consummate actor. Only his bulging jaw muscles revealed his seething anger.

Gazing at that set face, the men instinctively retained their rigid bearing despite the command, "At ease!" Realizing that greater histrionics were called for, the major produced them.

"At ease!" he insisted, forcing a thin smile to his tense lips.

"Well, Python," he said with assumed jocularity, "is that any way to say thanks for a nice fish dinner?"

Python's growl was uncompromising.

"All right! All right, you old ingrate!" laughed Fink, trying to appear tolerantly amused. "Go ahead! Eat it up! But you'd better improve your manners, old boy, if you want me to bring you more tomorrow!"

And turning, he strolled toward the officers' quarters with a gait that fell far short of matching the racing tempo of his angry reflections on his lost dinner and old Python's misbegotten maternal ancestors.

On the barracks porch behind him the little group of soldiers slowly relaxed.

"Whew!" said a young corporal, nervously mopping his perspiring brow. "It's a good thing Fussy didn't see Sergeant Casey's big foot nudging that door open for the old mutt! There sure would have been hell to pay then!"



HAVING discovered Python's weakness, Major Fink was not slow to press his advantage. The next day he again climbed off the four o'clock trolley from Bottomside with a fish under his arm. The scene of the previous afternoon was re-enacted, except that the major made sure that he did not leave the fish where the dog could steal it again. He whacked off the tail as before, and then as he left the kitchen after downing his daily mug of coffee, he dangled another generous slice before the old dog. Python was entranced. His eye glistened, his nostrils quivered, and his mouth drooled.

Looking around him to make sure that the few soldiers lounging in front of barracks were watching, the major elaborately patted Python's head and scratched his ear, meanwhile talking to him as gently as if he were a dearly loved and life-long pet. The old dog didn't make the slightest protest. His eye was glued to that piece of fish. With a final pat on the head the major gave it to him and marched triumphantly away.

"I'll show this outfit a thing or two!" he exulted. "I'll not only bring that damned cur to heel, but I'll collect that hundred pesos from the colonel right in front of all the officers!"

And I'll wipe the smirks off the faces of the men of this battalion, too! I'll teach 'em what discipline is! They'll soldier, by heaven, and soldier right! They'll learn what a real officer is!"

Now while these sweet dreams of triumph filled the major's head, far different and gloomier thoughts depressed the spirits of the men of Battery G. At first they were rather amused by old Python's hypocrisy. But as day after day went by and he collected his fish with no show of resentment to the major's caresses, the men became alarmed. What they saw with their own eyes was bad enough, but the major's boasting at Headquarters, as reported by the sergeant-major, filled them with rage and consternation. Somehow, for the honor of Battery G and old Python himself, this had to be stopped!

Only two weeks of the two months the colonel and Major Fink had agreed upon remained, and on the surface the major seemed well on his way to win his bet. A gloomy and downhearted group of Battery G non-coms was gathered in the squad room bewailing Python's defection.

"If I didn't see it, I'd never believe it," sighed a corporal. "Not another officer, not even our own captain, gets anything but a growl from him. And yet that popinjay Fink has him eating out of his hand!"

"Not only that," moaned the mess sergeant, "but look how he treats me—me that's fed him every day for a year! I save him liver. I save him the choicest bones, and catch hell from the captain for not using 'em for soup, and do you think he'll touch 'em? Not him! All he does is wait for that damned brass hat and his fish!"

Old Sergeant Casey who stood nearby listening to their laments could stand it no longer.

"A fine lot o' weepin' old women ye are!" he burst out disgustedly. "An' a dumb bunch to boot! It's not the major the dog likes, ye nitwits! It's fish!"

"A very clever deduction!" said the mess sergeant sourly. "And what does your super-deductive mentality suggest we do about it?"

"Sure," replied Casey slowly as he scraped at the bowl of his pipe, "an' 'tis no wonder they pulled ye out of a gun crew and put ye in a kitchen instead! Ye've no sense o' strategy at all, at all! Did it niver occur to ye to fight fire with fire?"

"Meaning what?" asks the mess sergeant, gazing questioningly at the big Irishman.

"Meaning fish!" snapped Casey. "Lots o' fish. Fish till it comes out o' his ears!"

Up at the Post Exchange there was a sudden boom in the sale of fishing tackle. And down in the native barrio at Bottomside there was a brisk business in the renting of bancas with native paddlers. Overnight the men of Bat-

tery G had become ardent disciples of Izaak Walton.

For a few days Python was in heaven. He had fish for breakfast, dinner and supper and at all hours in between; but, best of all, there was so much available that some of it inevitably mellowed. And, as Sergeant Casey pointed out, mellow fish is to a dog what mellow cheese is to an epicure.

Having all the fish he wanted from his own friends, and that of a delightful ripeness that tickled his nose as well as his palate, Python promptly lost all interest in the major and his daily offerings.



AT FIRST the major couldn't understand it. Two or three days after G Battery went into the fishing business, he got off the trolley car with the daily fish under his arm. Python, instead of greeting him with his usual enraptured look, just lay and watched him. When he cut off a generous slice and offered it, the dog showed no interest. When he persisted and tried to pat Python's head, a low rumbling growl warned him that his attention was unwelcome. The major stepped back, puzzled and frowning.

"Must be off his feed today," he said to Sergeant Casey who was standing near by.

"'Yis, sorr," the old Irishman agreed innocently. "Probably somethin' he ate."

Accepting the explanation, and dismissing the situation as temporary, the major went on to his quarters.

When, however, the scene was repeated the following afternoon with even more pronounced resentment on the part of Python, the major's suspicions were aroused. And when he glanced about him at the increased number of men lounging in front of barracks and noted the covert and triumphant glances that flashed among them, he suddenly realized that there was more to Python's indisposition than a mere upset stomach. Whirling angrily, he stamped off around the end of barracks to the garbage stand. Yanking open the screened door, he was about to hurl his scorned offering into one of the cans when suddenly his arm was arrested in mid-air.

"Ah!" Slowly his arm descended. "So!" he snorted. "So, that's the answer! Fish heads! Fish tails! Fish bones! Well, we'll just check up on this!"

He threw his own fish into the can, slammed the screen door, and strode angrily through the back door of G Battery's kitchen.

"Sergeant!" he barked at the mess sergeant. "Come here!"

The mess sergeant came.

"You make out the battery menus a week in advance, don't you?"

"Yes, sir." The sergeant was surprised.

"This is Wednesday. You made out a menu last Sunday for Monday breakfast to Saturday supper inclusive, didn't you?"

"Y—yes, sir." Now the sergeant was apprehensive.

"Have you followed it strictly?" asked the major.

"Yes, sir."

The sergeant, remembering that the major had just come in from the garbage stand and also that there was no fish on the menu, was thinking fast.

"Yes, sir, except for cooking a few fish that some of the men caught for themselves."

"Themselves?" queried the major softly.

"Themselves?" he repeated, staring unblinkingly at the sergeant.

"Ye—yes, sir," stammered the sergeant.

"Sergeant," snapped the major, "you're lying! Do you hear me? Lying!"

He paused for a moment. The sergeant's face went white, but he made no reply.

"Very well!" continued the major caustically. "So the men of this battery have been fishing for themselves. Well, from now on they're going to do a few other things for themselves. If they have time to fish, they also have time to clean and paint their guns and tractors and do some other policing up around here! This battery's equipment and barracks are a disgrace!"

"Why, sir!" protested the shocked sergeant. "We've had the Regimental Efficiency Pennant for the last six months straight!"

"That may be," snapped the major, "but from what I've seen of this regiment so far that doesn't mean very much!"

"But, sir," continued the alarmed soldier, "the men have only gone fishing in the afternoon when they were off duty. That's allowed by Post Regulations, sir."

"Don't tell me what's allowed and what isn't!" shouted the major. "I'll give the orders in this battalion! This sleeping and loafing every afternoon is ridiculous! From now on I'm going to see that the men of this outfit do some useful work!"

The major was as bad as his word. The very next afternoon his new program for G Battery started with a bang. True, Post Regulations provided for no regular drills or work in the hot afternoons. Long experience in the tropics had taught the Army that any other policy was unwise. The major, however, was craftily prepared to defend his orders as emergency measures to insure the best possible conditioning of their equipment. G Battery repainted its already immaculate guns and tractors. It repainted the quartermaster cots in barracks. And when there was nothing else to clean or paint, the unhappy battery found itself restricted to barracks each afternoon because of unsatisfactory trifles at inspections.

The battery officers were outraged. The captain protested vigorously but vainly to the major who knew perfectly well that the battery commander could not properly go to the colonel without his permission.

And so, as the two months drew to a close, G Battery toiled and sweated and fumed, while the major grimly resumed his wooing of old Python. But the dog's attitude did not change. Nor did he evince the slightest interest in the bit of fish which the major offered him. G Battery anglers might be confined to barracks, but there were other batteries in the regiment not in the major's battalion and their members took up the rod and reel in Python's behalf. Fish he had, and plenty. Fish till he could no longer stand the sight of it. Fish till his gluttonous old stomach rebelled and he was more than happy to return to the mess sergeant's choice scraps and luscious bones.

The major fought grimly. Abandoning fish, he desperately tried other delicacies, special dog biscuits, bits of liver. His efforts availed him nothing. The dog's growls grew louder and the sands of time ran out.



THE two months were up. It was Saturday morning and the men of Battery G had been busy since reveille policing barracks, smoothing out pillows and blankets, lining up cots and footlockers, getting ready for inspection. Now they were laying out pistol belts and easing themselves carefully into their best starched khaki uniforms preliminary to falling in for the outdoor inspection that always preceded the inspection of barracks.

Old Python was dreaming noisily under Private Maloney's bunk, oblivious to all the bustle around him; but the men were jittery and apprehensive. All the regiment was gleefully aware that Fussy Fink would have to pay his bet that day; but the men of Battery G were also painfully aware that for that very reason this Saturday inspection was not likely to be pleasant. The major's bitterness and anger were certain to be vented on them. Furthermore, there was a ball game that afternoon between the regiment's unbeaten nine and a strong team of the Thirty-first Infantry from Manila. Nothing would please the major better than to find some trifling excuse to restrict them to barracks and prevent them from attending the game.

Suddenly Python raised his head, cocked his one good ear, and gazed intently toward the squadroom door. A low growl rumbled in his throat—the same timely growl that had so often warned them of approaching brass hats. All eyes turned apprehensively toward the door, outside of which voices were now plainly audible.

"But, sir," the battery commander was protesting, "I thought you'd inspect in the usual order—in ranks outside first and then in barracks. Besides, sir, it's not time for assembly yet and the men aren't ready."

"Aren't ready!" snorted Fink impatiently. "And why not, I'd like to know? They've had plenty of time! Besides, any decent battery is always ready!"

Brushing past the captain, the major strode into the squadroom. Before anyone could even call "Attention!" Python came rushing out from under Maloney's bunk, snarling so viciously that the old soldier leaped forward in mortal terror and grabbed him by the collar. The startled major leaped back, his face like chalk. Then a rush of purple suffused his neck and cheeks as he swung angrily toward Maloney.

"Take that damned cur out of here!" he yelled. "Get him out, I say! Lock him up in the supply room till after inspection! This time he goes! You hear me? You take the ten o'clock boat for Manila and take that cur with you! And leave him there, do you understand? Don't let me ever lay eyes on him again, if you know what's good for you!"

Maloney was heartbroken.

"Please, sir—" he began.

"Quiet!" roared Fink. "Not another word! Do as I say or I'll lock you up for disobedience of orders!"

Tears glistened in the old soldier's rheumy eyes.

"Y—yes, sir," he mumbled brokenly as he pulled and tugged at the angry dog and finally dragged him out of the room.

What happened to Battery G that morning, it is shameful to relate. The major took a deep and angry breath, clenched his teeth and waded in. Not a thing was right. Not a man escaped his probing eyes and vitriolic tongue. And when it was all over and First Call sounded, only half of the story had been told. Every man from first sergeant to recruit had been restricted to barracks for the entire week-end, and the outdoor inspection still lay ahead.

Mutiny has seldom sullied our American arms, but that morning only a wild and loud-mouthed leader was needed to incite that half-crazed group of outraged men into open rebellion. The captain knew it and walked, white-faced, back into barracks as the major departed.

"Men," he said, his voice shaking with emotion, "I've served in every grade from private to captain and I know exactly how you feel. I don't blame you, but I can't permit any rash or foolish conduct. As battery commander, I've never let you down. I give you my word as a soldier that I never will. I promise you that this whole affair will be laid before the regimental commander the minute outdoor inspection is over."

That will mean going over my superior's head, but I'll do it if it costs me my commission! I'll stick my neck out, but you're not going to stick out any of yours. I'm still your battery commander and you'll obey me, do you understand?"

He paused, breathing hard.

"That I will! To hell and back!" said Sergeant Casey fiercely.

"Yes! Yes!" shouted the men.

"Thank you, Casey! Thank you, men!" said the captain. "Now get your equipment on and fall in on the battery parade when assembly sounds. And, remember, not a word from any of you, no matter what happens!"

It was a tight-lipped and sullen group that lined up in front of barracks a few minutes later. Only implicit faith in their "old man" kept them silent and smartly obedient as the first sergeant dressed the ranks and solemnly reported "All present or accounted for, sir!" to the battery commander.



OUT in front of the battery Major Fink drew a handkerchief from his pocket and flicked the dust from the shiny boots which his unfortunate striker had spent hours polishing the night before. Then he replaced the handkerchief, stepped forward into position, and drew himself haughtily to attention.

"Report!" he barked.

Slowly the captain returned the first sergeant's salute.

"Take your post!" he ordered.

"Report!" barked Fink again.

Very deliberately the captain executed a beautiful about face, brought his arm up slowly in a perfect salute, and reported, "G Battery present or accounted for, sir!"

Suddenly a worried look came over the captain's face as he noticed a shaggy brown form peering out from under the tarpaulin covering the 155 mm. gun behind the major.

The major impatiently returned his salute.

"Captain Smith, and you men of Battery G," he began harshly.

All eyes in ranks were staring grimly ahead.

"Of all the rag-tag and bobtail organizations," continued the major, "this is the worst!"

He paused.

Instead of staring straight ahead, every eye now seemed to be focused on him. And they weren't angry eyes. They were questioning and puzzled.

Maybe these men were properly cowed after all, thought the major.

Little did he know that those puzzled eyes were focused not on him but on the creeping brown form behind him that moved so stealthily, and yet with such an air of utter contempt.

"There is one thing that I want you to get clearly into your heads," resumed the major.

The shaggy brown shape edged slowly but steadily nearer to his booted legs. Frowns deepened on the questioning faces before him, but the major went on.

"You are by far the least efficient of the three batteries in my battalion!"

Again the major paused, waiting for this latest insult to sink in.

Somehow, the men before him were not registering the proper response. Crinkled lines were appearing around their eyes. Faces were twitching, as if under great restraint. Chests were heaving and shoulders were shaking.

The major's lips tightened into a thin line as he glared at the battery. In the ranks faces were turning red. Choking, strangled sounds assailed the major's outraged ears.

Meanwhile, unnoticed by the now furious officer, the shaggy brown form had halted beside his shiny left boot. Sniffing the boot a moment in his age-old ritual, Python slowly lifted his right rear leg and held it for a second in quivering suspense.

Suddenly, all pent-up emotion, and with it all discipline, left the battery in an explosive roar of shouting, screaming laughter.

The major was wild.

He clenched his hands. He gritted his teeth. His jaw muscles bulged. For a second he stood glaring at this unheard-of insubordination. Then, abruptly, following the gaze of those one hundred pairs of eyes, his glance jerked down toward his shiny left boot.

With an oath he suddenly leaped sideways, lashing out viciously at the unregenerate old cur. Glistening with all the freshness of the morning dew, gleaming with a luster never produced by human hands or polish, the boot sparkled with myriad gems of canine hate.

The major choked. He gasped. He swore. Then, clawing at the buttoned flap of his pistol holster he bounded after the disreputable old chow while peals of uncontrollable laughter rang round his maddened ears.

Twisting and snarling, old Python backed around the end of barracks and into his favorite spot under the garbage stand, the major hot on his trail.

Suddenly the major skidded to a halt. Before him stood the colonel and the adjutant. Engaged in an inspection of his regimental area, the colonel had arrived in the vicinity in time to witness the last round of Fink's historical battle with Python.

"Good morning, Fink," said the colonel, controlling his mirth with visible effort. "Well, I see old Python still hasn't quite come to heel. From the looks of things, however," he added, with a twinkle in his eye and a glance at the major's boot, "I'd say he hadn't come very far from it!"

The colonel's jibe was enough to set the major off again.

"Heel!" he yelled, grabbing for his gun butt and starting for the dog. "I'll heel him! I'll blast that damned cur off the face of the earth! I'll—"

"Just a minute, Fink!"

The chill in the colonel's voice froze the major in his tracks.

"We'll take things up in order! First, your two months were up yesterday, so I'll ask the adjutant to turn over your one hundred pesos to me now."

With a smile of satisfaction the adjutant quickly handed over the money he had held.

"Very well, sir!" yelled Fink, almost beside himself with rage and humiliation. "Very well! I've paid my bet. Now that damned dog goes!"

"No!" The colonel's voice was deadly. "The dog doesn't go! The dog stays! You go! I told you that if you used any of your heeling methods on the men of this regiment I'd transfer you out of it, and that's just what I'm going to do! I've just had a radio from Headquarters in Manila asking for an officer for detail in the Quartermaster's office. The only kind of 'chow' to worry you over there is the kind they call 'rations'—and you'd better see that this regiment gets its share, or I'll sic old Python on you myself, so help me! See that you take the first boat in the morning!"

Mouth agape, completely crushed by this disastrous turn of events, the major could only stand and stare as the colonel walked away. Suddenly from the barracks behind him, rising above the mocking laughter of old Python's many friends, came the derisive notes of some wag's improvising:

*"It makes no difference if he ain't a hound,
You gotta quit kicking our Chow around!"*

Completely deflated, eyes smarting with tears of bitter humiliation, Fussy Fink turned and stumbled blindly toward his quarters, leaving old Python in complete and victorious possession of the field.



ASK ADVENTURE

Information You Can't Get Elsewhere

THE typical turtle is testudinarious.

Query:—As one *Adventure* expert to another I would like to ask your opinion concerning the evolutionary sequence of the development of the shell of turtles.

Am I correct in the following: starting with the most primitive, the soft shelled turtle *Trionyx* with no horny plates and with bony plates much reduced; next the snapping turtle with well developed horny plates but with bony plates considerably reduced; then the musk turtle which is intermediate between the snapping turtle and the following species; then follow the spotted, the painted and the wood turtles with well developed horny plates and well developed bony plates but shell not completely enclosing appendages when withdrawn; and finally the box turtle with highly arched carapace and plastron hinged to entirely enclosed appendages when withdrawn.

I have eliminated the leather back turtle *Dermochelys* from the discussion as not being a true turtle. However, this would precede the soft shelled turtle because of the lack of bony plates on the back.

I have read your "Turtles of United States and Canada" with much interest. Turtles and snakes have interested me much. I spend a great deal of time in the woods and see them frequently.

—S. W. Frost
State College, Penna.

Reply by Clifford H. Pope:—The oldest known turtles are found in the upper Keuper of the Triassic of Central Europe (*Triassochelys dux*; *Proganochelys quenstedtii*; *Proterochersis robusta*). These forms are typical land turtles of the general habitus of *Testudo*. They had a regular shell (thecal shell) and were covered with horny scales; the shell was complete. The complete shell is therefore a structure that was developed early in the history of turtle evolution.

Partial or complete reduction of the thecal shell (sea turtles, snapping turtles, *Archelon*, *Protosphargis*) occurs nearly always in connection with aquatic habits as does the relative flattening of the shell (painted turtle, map turtle). This condition must therefore be considered as secondary.

The shells of *Dermochelys* (which is a perfectly good turtle) and the soft shell turtles are both highly specialized and can-



not be compared with the thecal shells of ordinary forms; these so-called epithecal shells were formed after the thecal shell had been reduced to the nuchal plate and some plastral elements, and partially or completely cover these remaining thecal bones. The members of these two groups are therefore the most highly specialized of all turtles.

The phylogenetic origin of the thecal shell (in the lower Triassic, perhaps in the Permian) is unknown. There is one form, *Eunotosaurus*, from the Permian of South Africa, which might represent such a primitive turtle, but it is unfortunately not well enough known (see Romer, Paleontology).

ON SHIFTING your angling activity from South to West.

Query:—I would appreciate any information you can give me concerning trolling and bottom fishing, as done on the West Coast of the United States.

Have only done fishing here with rod and reel, so don't know the tackle to use, speeds, lures etc. which would be useful in going after the albacore, barracuda, bonita, etc., as are found on the coast of California. What rig would I use in going after the West Coast halibut, which I understand is a bottom fish found off California?

—A. P. Marques
Camp Gordon Johnston, Florida.

Reply by C. Blackburn Miller:—The varieties of fish which you mention and which are found off the California coast can be taken with tackle and lures similar to those which you have become accustomed to in Florida. These fish will all take a spoon or cut bait, though the albacore and bonita prefer a faster pace (9 knots) than does the barracuda. The weight of tip and line thread is approximately the same as what you have been using.

The catching of halibut, however, is another thing entirely and this rig, patronized by professional fishermen, consists of a large baited hook and a tarred handline which should be handled with gloves. Halibut are bottom feeding fish and grow to a considerable size so that appropriate gear is necessary. Large lead sinkers are required and the hooks are generally baited with fish.

Halibut and other bottom feeding fishes which are found on the west coast are taken successfully on "trot" lines, which are lengths of line of several hundred feet to which are attached leader lines of several feet in length, each with baited hooks. These are permitted to stay for several hours after being laid and are then raised, rebaited and reset.

TROUBLED by the housing shortage? Get a sawmill and build your own.

Query:—I am interested in a milling machine, and as I know nothing about the business, I turn to you. Specifically, I'd like to know: what size and types of milling machines would be required to build moderate sized homes out of native timber?

—John L. Waggaman
San Francisco, Calif.

Reply by Hapsburg Liebe:—You ask, "What size and types of milling machines would be required to build moderate sized homes out of native timber?"

This would mean, as well as a sawmill for cutting raw lumber, planing mill facilities. Planing mills run into real money. In your place, I'd operate the sawmill and pay somebody else to dress the lumber. Incidentally, lumber must be seasoned, dried, before it goes to a planing mill.

So we'll take it for granted that you want an ordinary "groundhog" type sawmill, complete with edger saw, cut-off, carriage and track, belting, power plant, etc. One thing to watch here is to have a main saw (circular) big enough for your logs. For instance, a saw of 60-inches diameter will cut a log of some 26 inches diameter, since some space is taken up by the central collar. (If you don't cut through the center of a log, as they do in quartering oak, you can cut a log of considerably more than 26-inch diameter on a 60-inch saw. Slabbing off the first side takes the log diameter down a few inches.) Heavy timbers are required for main-saw frame and carriage track; for edger and cut-off saws, lighter timbers will do. A millwright, or an especially handy carpenter, would be necessary for setting the mill up.

As to the power plant. In my sawmilling days, it was steam, using offal from the mill—slabs, edgings, etc.—for firing the boiler. I understand some of the smaller mills are using gasoline power now, and selling the offal for firewood.

The war has upset things so much that I cannot tell you where you could buy a mill. Anyway, you should be able to save money in buying a used outfit. Be careful that it isn't worn out, if you buy one. I suggest this. Write the leading lumber journal, which is *The American Lumberman*, 431 S. Dearborn St., Chicago, enclosing 25¢ for sample copy, and look through the Machinery-For-Sale columns. Maybe they can tip you off to something.

THE heep-hep Snake Dance of the Hopi Indians.

Query:—Early next spring I intend to make an automobile trip to Albuquerque and back. While on this trip I would like to see as much Indian territory and ceremonial affairs as possible. I thought that perhaps you could advise me as to the best time to come in order to see a few dances, etc. and also have reasonably good weather conditions. Any time from February until May would be convenient for me.

Would you advise a drive over through Tuba City, Ariz. and the Batakan Ruins? Would it be safe to leave one's car unguarded and hike into the desert in this country? My reason for asking this is that I have been told not to trust the Indians too far in that region.

Is there any tribe of Indians that still holds a Snake Dance? If so, could one see it?

Would one be able to see a sand painting anywhere in your vicinity?

Are there any Indian dwellings around Santa Rita? If so, to what tribe do they belong? Have the Indians intermarried with the Mexicans to any extent? What is the principal Christian religion adopted by the Indians? Are they given any choice by the Indian Service?

Are there any Gila Monsters in the territory which I plan to traverse? Is their bite over-rated or is it really very poisonous? Do the Indians use them for food at all?

What Indian tribe inhabited what is known now as the Mesa Verde Park? Are the Indians around Cortez a branch of that tribe?

—William Reese
Magna, Utah

Reply by H. F. Robinson:—You want to make a trip from your home to Albuquerque, some time between February and May, and speak of driving down through Tuba City, Arizona—the time to depend upon the weather and the roads.

Coming down through southern Utah, into northern Arizona, you will be in high country, and winter is not over until, perhaps, April. I have been in snowstorms out there, and in fact have record of one in that country in May, although that was very unusual.

You suggest going via Tuba, and perhaps visiting the Batakan ruins. If you cross the Little Colorado on the high bridge on the way to Tuba, you can probably find a way to turn off to the east to Kayenta. From there to the ruins is a short distance, but you cannot make it by car, or at least could not some years ago when I was last in that section. You can get saddle horses and a guide at Kayenta, and make the round trip easily in one day.

From Kayenta you can find a fair road to Chin Lee and Canon de Chelle. This latter you should see by all means as it is full of

cliff dwellings—surveys by the government show some 1010 different groups. Here again you would have to leave the car and get horses or a team. To cover this trip will take several days and a camp outfit, as the ruins are scattered up and down two branches of the canyon for some forty miles. From Chin Lee to Ganado is not so far and then you can go from there directly south to Highway 66, or over the mountains to Fort Defiance and Windon Rock. Then into Gallup.

You ask about the Snake Dance. Yes, the Hopi Indians hold this ceremony each year, but it comes in August. The Hopis are between Tuba City and Ganado.

The sand paintings are used by the Navajos in ceremonies and are destroyed at the end of the ceremony. If you go from Ganado south to 66 and then east you will pass Manulito, and at one time they had a sand painting there, and if there is none you might find drawings of many of them. Mrs. Mile Kirk had a large collection she had made. At Gallup, in the Harvey House, you will find copies of many on the walls of the lobby of the hotel.

You ask about the Indians at Mesa Verde. There are none there—that is, living there—as the land was given to the Government in exchange for other lands farther west. The writer, who was an engineer in the Indian Service, was one of three who negotiated the trade with the Ute Indians, so the ruins on the mesa could be preserved. These are the same Indians that live west of Cortez. Mesa Verde is well worth a visit, and there is a fine road up to the top with a hotel, etc. At the time I first visited it, one could only get up a poor trail, and our party took a pack outfit and camped there.

You ask if the Indians intermarry with the "Mexicans." I presume that you have reference to the inhabitants of New Mexico and Arizona, who have been in this section of the country for four hundred years. No, there is very little intermarriage the last generation or two, but most of these "natives" or Spanish-Americans have more or less Indian blood, for the first settlers here were Spanish soldiers who had no women of their own blood and they intermarried with the Indians. In Mexico at least 90 percent of the people have more or less Indian blood for the same reason.

You ask about the Christian religion adopted by the Indians and whether they have their own free will in the matter. The Indian Service does not interfere with their choice of religion; in fact at the Indian boarding schools the pupils are given all chance to go to their choice of the churches—Catholic or Protestant.

No, you will not get into the area where the Gila Monster is a habitant. They keep to the lower, hot climate of southern Arizona, so far as I know. As to their bite being poisonous, I cannot say, but the general belief by scientists is that they have no poison—but a bite may infect one just as the bite of a dog may, even if not rabid.

I never heard of Indians or any one else eating one!

You ask about Indian dances, and I assume that you have reference mostly to the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico. In a general way the following is correct—

Nearly all the year through there are ceremonies, dances and games at the various pueblos. In January there are the dances of the "Sword Swallowers" at Zuni; in March in many of the villages they celebrate the turning in of the irrigation water by dances; in April, the "chongo" races at Isleta and ceremonies at Zuni; May sees relay races in Taos; in June, San Juan Day is celebrated in Acoma and elsewhere; July, the Katchina dances in the Hopi villages; August, many of the villages have corn dances and a big one at Jemez and Santo Domingo. Later are the harvest dances, and the biggest celebration of all is San Geronimo day at Taos. Then through the winter are hunting and similar dances. In fact there is no month of the year that does not see something of the kind, but as there are over twenty of the villages and these celebrations are not fixed dates in many cases one cannot give a list very accurately.

However, I would not advise an auto trip through northern Arizona and the sections mentioned until after danger of winter snows and rains have passed, for there are no paved roads north of Highway 66 until you get as far east as Gallup.

JUST a word of advice about the advisability of settling down in the island of Madagascar: Don't!

Query:—I would like very much to obtain any information possible concerning the island of Madagascar—settlers' laws, climate, industries, etc. Also any addresses of persons who could further help me. I have recently been discharged from the Army. As for the money end of it, I have several hundred dollars to start with.

—Ernest M. Doane
Lynn, Mass.

Reply by Ralph Linton:—I should strongly advise you not to attempt to settle in Madagascar, especially at the present time. It is almost impossible to obtain a clear title to land, due to the complicated native system of land tenure which vests land rights in villages or large kin groups, all of whose members have to be paid off. Also, at the present time the South Africans are still in occupation of the island, and although I have no direct news on this, I feel sure that the local French, who have always been jealous of foreign settlers and enterprises, would do their best to make things difficult for any American coming in.

To answer your other questions: the climate varies exceedingly in different parts of the island. The far south and western side is semi-desert, fairly hot at all seasons. The

east coast slopes up steeply toward the plateau and is covered for the most part with rain forest. The center plateau, with an average altitude around 3000 feet, has a temperate climate which is endurable for Europeans but unfortunately there, and in fact everywhere in the island, malaria is exceedingly bad. Plague is also endemic in the plateau, together with amoebic dysentery and other things of the sort.

As regards industries, they are practically limited to farming, cattle raising, and mining. There are very few manufactures, and those which do exist are on a small scale. The natives are clever craftsmen and make good mechanics with training, so that the opportunities for whites to make a living by mechanical skills are poor. The natives are as good as the average white mechanic and will work for much less than a white man can live on.

I am sorry to say that I cannot give you the addresses of persons who would be able to help you further at this point. Very few Americans have been in Madagascar or made contacts there, and most of my old friends there seem to have dropped out of sight during the war. However, I would strongly advise you to stay away from the island. It is unhealthy, labor is exceedingly difficult to get without government aid, and the French certainly will not do anything to help American settlers or businessmen at this time.

A "Big Bertha" for duck and goose.

Query:—What is a 12 ga. Magnum shotgun?

Some claim that it is a heavy, specially built shotgun with a barrel or barrels made of steel capable of handling a 3" or longer shell and nothing shorter.

Others state, just as vehemently, that any good grade of gun can be converted by drilling to accommodate a 3" or longer shell and that an ordinary 2¾" or shorter "low base" shell could be used in it.

—T. T. Chapman
Safety Dept.
N. O. T. S.
Inyokern, Calif.

Reply by Roy S. Tinney:—A true magnum is a ten-bore, a very special kind of shotgun, usually a custom job, made-to-order. The frame of the magnum ten and twelve-bores has about six ounces more material and a lot more strength than the regulation frame. The average weight of a magnum double-barrel ten-bore is around ten-and-a-half pounds. A magnum twelve-bore will run about eight-and-a-half pounds.

The ten-bore magnum has about a dozen yards more killing range than the magnum twelve-bore, for the simple reason it carries a lot more ammunition, two ounces of shot with a proportionate amount of powder. Because practically everyone who

wants a magnum for duck and goose shooting wants a ten-bore, I am inclined to believe the makers will eventually discontinue the manufacture of twelve-bore magnums. The magnums I have shot were all double barrel guns.

While it is perfectly safe to use the standard shell in a magnum, it is downright dangerous to fire a magnum shell in a standard gun; not designed to withstand the high breech pressure. The magnum ten-bore shell measures 3½", the magnum twelve 3".

FARMING in a warm, dry climate.

Query:—I am a veteran of World War I and have a pension of about \$88 a month and a wife. I am looking for a place where a man can settle down and make a living off the soil in a warm dry climate.

What are the conditions in Arizona?

—James W. Kennedy
Chicago, Ill.

Reply by C. C. Anderson:—Glad to help you if I can, so I will suggest to you exactly what I would do myself if conditions were reversed.

Write each county agricultural agent in Safford, Bisbee, Florence, Phoenix, Tucson and Yuma, Arizona.

Give them your experience in farming, tell them what you have to invest, if anything, or if you intend to work on someone else's farm. Regular farm hands in Arizona lead a pretty decent life if they stay away from the seasonal "camps." I mean don't get into the seasonal cotton-picking and citrus-fruit picking.

By writing the above county agents you will have covered all the counties in southern and central Arizona. These men will help you and each one knows local conditions.

Write the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway, Public Relations Dept., Los Angeles, Calif., for anything they have on agriculture in Arizona. Their stuff before the war was tops and they kept it current and gave production tables and everything.

If these reports tend to discourage you remember that conditions are not normal here. And I doubt very much if they are normal in your own state at this time. Everything is reflecting the national conditions which are upset as you know.

I have suggested only the "warm" counties in Arizona as you specified in your letter. There might be opportunities in the higher altitudes and if you do not get results from these suggestions write me again.

Write the Bureau of Reclamation, Parker, Arizona. I don't know who is in charge but tell them what you want and see if veterans have any preference on the lands reclaimed recently by Parker and Davis dams.

THE ASK ADVENTURE SERVICE is free, provided self-addressed envelope and **FULL POSTAGE** for reply are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries must enclose International Reply Coupons, which are exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.

Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do Not send questions to the magazine. Be definite; explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The magazine does not assume any responsibility. **No Reply** will be made to requests for partners, financial backing or employment.

★(Enclose addressed envelope with International Reply Coupon.)

Notice: Many of our *Ask Adventure* experts are still engaged in government service of one kind or another. Some are on active duty in the Army or Navy, others serving in an executive or advisory capacity on various of the boards and offices which were set up to hasten the nation's war effort. Almost without exception these men consented to remain on our staff, carry on their work for the magazine if humanly possible, but with the understanding that for the duration such work was to be of secondary importance to their official duties. This was as it should be, and when you didn't receive answers to queries as promptly as we all wished, your patience was appreciated. Foreign mails are still slow and uncertain, many are still curtailed drastically, but now that the war is over we can hope for a more expanded, smoother functioning *Ask Adventure* service very soon. Bear with us and we'll continue to try to serve you as speedily as possible.

ASK ADVENTURE EXPERTS

SPORTS AND HOBBIES

Archery—EARL B. POWELL, care of *Adventure*.

Baseball—FREDERICK LIER, care of *Adventure*.

Basketball—STANLEY CARIANT, 99 Broad St., Matawan, N. J.

Big Game Hunting in North America: Guides and equipment—A. H. CARRHART, c/o *Adventure*.

Boxing—COL. JEAN V. GEOMBACH, care of *Adventure*.

Camping—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Coins and Medals—WILLIAM L. CLARK, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th, N. Y. C.

Dogs—FREEMAN LLOYD, care of *Adventure*.

Fencing—COL. JEAN V. GEOMBACH, care of *Adventure*.

First Aid—DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, care of *Adventure*.

Fishing: Fresh water; fly and bait casting; bait casting outfits; fishing trips—JOHN ALDEN KNIGHT, 929 W. 4th St., Williamsport, Penna.

Fishing, Salt water: Bottom fishing, surf casting; trolling; equipment and locations—C. BLACKBURN MILLER, care of *Adventure*.

Fly and Bait Casting Tournament—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Maine.

Health-Building Activities, Hiking—DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, care of *Adventure*.

Horses and Horsemanship—JOHN RICHARD YOUNG, 8225 W. Wisconsin Avenue, Milwaukee 8, Wis.

Motor Boating—GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

Motorcycling: Regulations, mechanics, racing—CHARLES M. DODGE, care of *Adventure*.

Mountain Climbing—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 6520 Romaine St., Hollywood, Calif.

Old Songs—ROBERT WHITE, 918 W. 7th St., Los Angeles, Calif.

Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers: Foreign and American—DORSEAN WIGGINS, 170 Liberty Rd., Salem, Oregon.

Shotguns, American and Foreign: Wing Shooting and Field Trials—ROY S. TINKER, Chatham, New Jersey.

Small Boating: Skiffs, outboard, small launch, river and lake cruising—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11831 Burlin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

Swimming—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 115 West 11th St., N. Y., N. Y.

Swords, Spears, Pole Arms and Armor—MAJOR R. E. GARDNER, care of *Adventure*.

Track—JACKSON SCHOLS, R. D. No. 1, Doylestown, Pa.

Woodcraft—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Wrestling—MUEL E. THURSH, New York Athletic Club, 59th St. and 7th Ave., N. Y., N. Y.

Yachting—A. R. KNAUER, 6720 Jeffery Ave., Chicago, Ill.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Anthropology: American, north of the Panama Canal, customs, dress, architecture; pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Entomology: Insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects—DR. E. W. FROST, 465 E. Foster Ave., State College, Penna.

Forestry, North American: The U. S. Forestry Service, our national forests, conservation and use—A. H. CARRHART, c/o *Adventure*.

Forestry, Tropical: Tropical forests and products—WM. B. RABOURN, care of U. S. Forest Service, Glenn Bldg., Atlanta, Ga.

Herpetology: Reptiles and amphibians—CLIFFORD H. POPE, care of *Adventure*.

Mining, Prospecting, and Precious Stones: *Anywhere in North America. Prospectors' outfitting; any mineral, metallic or non-metallic*—VICTOR SHAW, care of Adventure.

Ornithology: *Birds; their habits and distribution*—DAVIS QUINN, 5 Minerva Pl., Bronx, N. Y.

Photography: *Outfitting, work in out-of-the-way places; general information*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.

Radio: *Telegraphy, telephony, history, receiver construction, portable sets*—DONALD MCNICOL, care of Adventure.

Railroads: *In the United States, Mexico and Canada*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill.

Sawmilling:—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of Adventure.

Sunken Treasure: *Treasure ships; deep-sea diving; salvage operations and equipment*—LIEUTENANT HARRY E. RIENKBERG, care of Adventure.

Taxidermy:—EDWARD B. LANG, 14 N. Burnett St., East Orange, N. J.

Wildcrafting and Trapping:—RAYMOND S. SPENGLER, 11331 Burlin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

MILITARY, NAVAL AND POLICE

Military Aviation:—O. B. MYERS, care of Adventure.

Federal Investigation Activities:—*Secret Service, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, care of Adventure.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police:—*It's history, duties and tradition*—H. S. M. KEMP, 501 10th St., E., Prince Albert, Sask.

The French Foreign Legion:—GEORGES SUREZ, care of Adventure.

State Police:—FRANCIS H. BENT, care of Adventure.

GEOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTS

Philippine Islands:—BUCK CONNER, Conner Field, Quantico, Ariz.

New Guinea:—L. P. B. ARMIT, care of Adventure.

New Zealand, Cook Island, Samoa:—TOM L. MILLS, 27 Bowen St., Wellding, New Zealand.

Australia and Tasmania:—ALAN FOLEY, 243 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia.

South Sea Islands:—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, No. 1 Flat "Scarborough," 83 Sidney Rd., Manley N. S. W., Australia.

Madagascar:—RALPH LINTON, Dept. of Anthropology, Columbia University, N. Y., N. Y.

Africa, Part 1 ★Libya, Morocco, Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan—CAPT. H. W. RADNIG, 8808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C. 2 Abyssinia, Italian Somaliland, British Somali Coast Protectorate, Eritrea, Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya—GORDON MACCERAGH, care of Adventure. 3 Tripoli, Sahara caravans—CAPTAIN BEVELLY-GIDDINGS, care of Adventure. 4 Bechuanaland, Southwest Africa, Angola, Belgian Congo, Egyptian Sudan and French West Africa—MAJOR S. L. GLENISTER, care of Adventure. 5 Cape Province, Orange Free State, Natal, Zululand, Transvaal, Rhodesia—PETER FRANKLIN, Box 1491, Durban, Natal, So. Africa.

Asia, Part 1 ★Siam, Malay States, Straits, Settlements, Java, Sumatra, Dutch East Indies, Ceylon—V. B. WINDLE, care of Adventure. 4 Persia, Arabia—CAPTAIN BEVELLY-GIDDINGS, care of Adventure. 5 Palestine—CAPTAIN H. W. ELDES, 8808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C.

Europe, Part 1—Denmark, Germany, Scandinavia—G. I. COLEBORN, care of Adventure.

Central America:—ROBERT SPIERS BENJAMIN, care of Adventure.

South America, Part 1 Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Chile—EDGAR YOUNG, care of Adventure.

West Indies:—JOHN B. LEFFINGWELL, Box 1333, Nueva Gerona, Isle of Pines, Cuba.

Iceland:—G. I. COLEBORN, care of Adventure.

Finland and Greenland:—VICTOR SHAW, care of Adventure.

Labrador:—WILMOT T. DEBELL, care of Adventure.

Mexico, Part 1 Northern Border States—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex. 2 Quintana Roo, Yucatan Campeche—CAPTAIN W. BUSSELL SHERRE, care of Adventure.

Canada, Part 1 ★Southeastern Quebec—WILLIAM MACMILLAN, 89 Laurentide Ave., Quebec, Canada. 3 Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario—HARRY M. MOORE, 579 Isabella, Pembroke Ont., Canada. 4 ★Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario, National Parks Camping—A. D. L. ROBINSON, 103 Wemyss Rd. (Forest Hill), Toronto, Ont., Canada. 5 ★Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta—C. FLOWDEN, Plowden Bay, Howe Sound, B. C. 6 ★Northern Saskatchewan; Indian life and language, hunting, trapping—H. S. M. KEMP, 501 10th St., E., Prince Albert, Sask.

Alaska:—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 6520 Romaine St., Hollywood, Calif.

Western U. S., Part 1 Pacific Coast States—FRANK WINCH, care of Adventure. 3 New Mexico; Indians, etc.—H. F. ROBINSON, 720 W. New York Ave., Albuquerque, N. M. 4 Nevada, Montana and Northern Rockies—FRED W. EGELSTON, Elks' Home, Elko, Nev. 5 Idaho and environs—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill. 6 Arizona, Utah—C. C. ANDERSON, Holbrook Tribune-News, Holbrook, Arizona. 7 Texas, Oklahoma—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Middle Western U. S., Part 2 Ohio River and Tributaries and Mississippi River—GEO. A. ZERR, 81 Cannon St., Pittsburgh, Pa. 3 Lower Mississippi from St. Louis down, Louisiana swamps, St. Francis, Arkansas Bottom—RAYMOND S. SPENGLER, 11331 Burlin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

Eastern U. S., Part 1 Maine—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Me. 2 Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I., Mass.—HOWARD E. VOIGT, P. O. Box 716, Woodmont, Conn. 3 Adirondacks, New York—RAYMOND S. SPENGLER, 11331 Burlin Ave., Inglewood, Calif. 5 Ala. Tenn. Miss., N. C.; S. C., Fla., Ga.—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of Adventure. 6 The Great Smokies and Appalachian Mountains south of Virginia—PAUL M. FINE, Jonesboro, Tenn.

(Continued from page 8)

Like other antiquated, ill-equipped armies they relied heavily on pack animals, but always the supply was below the demand. Chinese stock, inferior in breed and strength even in normal times, had been depleted by the war, and the only immediate source for replacements was the herds of such western bordering mountain tribes as the Lolos.

In this emergency it was decided to send out horse-buying parties. At best this was a stop gap, a desperate effort to meet a desperate situation. But the Chinese, fighting with their backs to the wall, were in no position to pass up any chance, however slight. And in their predicament a few thousand head of fresh pack animals could have spelled the difference between another limited withdrawal and complete collapse of the southern front.

But the political situation, Chinese vis-à-vis Lolo, was ticklish. The Lolos are a proud independent people who oppose every form of Chinese control. They live in relatively isolated mountain gorges along the fringe of southwest China, skirmish with Chinese patrols from habit, and refuse to submit to outside authority. At this point I can only surmise why American personnel were sent into Lolo territory instead of Chinese. Ordinarily the Chinese would be the ones to conduct a semi-diplomatic-economic mission of this nature, but on the other hand the Yanks had no local axes to grind and were noted for their open-handedness. There was no centuries-old antagonism and suspicion between Lolo and American, whereas the Chinese might have been held up in endless negotiations, or even stirred up actual hostilities. I think it is safe to assume that the Chinese command had this potential danger in mind and requested the Americans, ever so subtly, to undertake the job for them as a kind of goodwill operation.

It was in this narrow strip of Lolo Land that the GIs and the Tibetan horse dealers met. The political boundary of eastern Tibet lies several hundred miles to the west of this point, but the high plateau country extending beyond China's western mountain wall to the actual frontier is inhabited by Tibetans. The Tibetans in this region are similar to the Lolos in that they are citizens of the Chinese Republic in name only. They are not so hostile, however, and drive regular caravans of tea, yaks and horses over the passes through Lolo country to do business with the Chinese. Someday the UNO may get around to taking a plebiscite and will straighten out a few ethnological headaches in this part of the world.

O. B. MYERS, who joins our staff of *Ask Adventure* experts this month to answer queries in the field of military aviation, introduces himself thuswise on signing the roster for the first time—

I have either, as the expression goes, been 'pursuing an aviation career', or else the career has been pursuing me. I'm not quite sure which describes it, but it's quite a chase.

Said career commenced in 1894, meandered through the usual boyhood, and completed schoolroom education in 1916 at Columbia University. Mental efforts culminated in a degree of Electrical Engineer; muscular efforts, to wit, four years of rowing including one season stroking the varsity crew, culminated in a heart 50% over-size—which incidentally has always stood me in good stead.

After a year of engineering work with the telephone company, I enlisted in June of 1917 as private, in what was then the Aviation Section, Signal Reserve Corps, went overseas to train in Italy, and learned to fly under Italian instructors who spoke no English. I joined the First Pursuit Group on the Western Front, flying Spads, and ended the war a 1st Lieutenant, with a couple of confirmed victories and a Distinguished Service Cross.

Returning to the U.S.A. after more than two years in France and Italy, I did a little barnstorming with horse-powered baby carriages known as Canadian Jennies, but then diverged from the air career to follow a variegated pattern for a number of years. I ran a small gas plant, was a partner in a Ford agency, sold baling machinery, assisted a private detective, represented an asbestos mine, and marketed insulation and pipe covering. And on the side, got married and had a daughter who was very young when she was born but now, surprisingly, is old enough to vote. Along about 1930 I got back into the air world, and began to write aviation articles and fiction.

When the war clouds began to thicken in 1941, I again volunteered for military service, and in October was assigned to active duty as a major under Air Service Command. After a year spent supervising training of air technicians at Middletown, Pa., I was given command of the sub-depot at the army air base at Richmond, Va., and later of an air depot at Flushing, L. I., and La Guardia Field. In October of 1943 I was sent to England where, a few months later, I took command of a service team in the 9th Air Force. It was my luck to stick with this outfit, which later became the 474th Air Service Group, right through the European show. Attached to a Fighter Group, we went ashore on the continent over Omaha Beach and spent ten months moving from field to field clear across northern France, Belgium, and into Germany so deep that after V-E day we had to back up and turn our last field over to the Russians. It was a swell outfit; the fact that I came home, in December of 1945, wearing a Bronze Star and a French Croix de Guerre, in addition to a handful of battle stars, is more to the credit of the men who earned these decorations for their C.O. by their guts and their prodigious accomplishments

than to any personal merit on my part.

The notorious barracks joke has it that a decoration, together with a nickel, will get you a cup of coffee anywhere; in other words, the war is over. So now, having wound up my second World War, I am reveling in what they call 'readjustment', writing again, and an unconquerable urge to write about the air would seem to prove that that aviation career is still pursuing me—or vice versa.

We consider ourselves fortunate to be able to add Mr. Myers to our staff—a man who has been active in his field during two wars as well as in the period between, and one who knows how to write about his subject authoritatively and interestingly. He is a welcome recruit to our ranks of experts.

BILL GIANELLA of Oakland, California sends us a copy of a letter he just wrote to P. Schuyler Miller of Scotia, New York, the reader whose query on Colombian hammocks was answered in our June *Ask Adventure* section by Edgar Young. We thought the additional information Bill sent along to Scotia was too interesting to be kept for private consumption so we're sharing Mr. Miller's hammock-reading with you below. Mr. Gianella wrote—

There used to be hammocks made in Colombia, and as far as I know there should still be because Colombia is a land in which the coming of the new does not eliminate the old. For instance, once at Puerto Barrio I saw a ferry service powered by the most up-to-date Johnson outboard motor, but it was not on any craft of metal or plastic or even of planking. It was mounted on the grand daddy of dug-outs.

Back about 1928 there was a town a couple of days up the Magdalena that was far-famed for both its hammocks and its rum. I can not recall its name but I daresay many of the oilfield workers of that day would. Someday the name of the place will come back to me. It has not stuck in my memory because it was just a place to pass on the way to the placer mine country that lay in the high country to the South.

These hammocks were not as generous as those that Edgar Young describes in June issue of *Adventure* but, believe it or not, except for lacking the fringe they looked just like the one shown in the *Ask Adventure* heading. These hammocks were woven in eye-pleasing colors. Cost about \$8 to \$10.

The natives who made short trips on the boats brought with them a different type. Like a piece of fish net about four by ten feet with the rope gadget at each end adding several yards more to them. In spite of the great length these fish-net style hammocks were not very bulky.

I believe this fish-net type is the kind

most used, but do not believe them worth a hoot any place except where the weather both night and day is too hot to use any kind of bedding. I believe that in any place where bedding is necessary they would require enough extra bedding to offset anything their lightness would save.

The Colombians of the high country do not go in strong for hammocks. It strikes me that hammocks are used only where one needs ventilation on all sides.

Can anyone help jar Bill's memory so we can get Mr. Miller ensconced in his hammock before snowfall?

AND the following from Chico McCrae of Colorado Springs, Colo., who sounds like he ought to have a yarn or two to contribute at one of those TTT sessions at which Edgar Young officiates. McCrae writes—

Concerning "Swamp Fever" in the May *Adventure*, this writer is perfectly willing to believe that the "Dr. Tower" of Bill Dubois and perhaps other unknown "Drs. Tower" reasoned out the mosquito-malaria-yellow-jack connection before the publicized discovery in Cuba.

Shortly after the U. S. began operations on the Panama Canal project, this writer sailed from New York for Colon with 71 other men. I was the youngest of the group aged 18. On the way down the ship's surgeon took an interest in me and among other advice on "How To Keep Alive In the Tropics" he told me this:

"We are due in Colon next Monday. On Thursday you take 3 grains of quinine; Friday, 6 grains; Saturday, 9 grains; Sunday, 12 grains, and on Monday, 15 grains; maintain that dosage for 3 days, then taper back down to 3 grains." I did so.

Now at that time we had no sulfa drugs, no penicillin, no mosquito nets and no distilled water. We had a choice of drinking from the swamp or from the tanks of the locomotives along the right-of-way. The food was pretty foul also. We did have, however, malaria, yellow jack, bubonic plague, Chagres fever and some other things. Yet, though the youngest and probably the weakest of the unit, I never "caught" any of these diseases, and I took no more quinine.

At the beginning of this last war, I sent in these observations to the Surgeon General, U.S. Army, and received a very courteous reply, but he did not say whether he would use such advance treatment or not. Sounds sensible to me—I was full of quinine before any mosquito could bite me. Anyhow I never had malaria.

We haven't obtained any modern medical opinion on the "McCrae preventive method for malaria" but it sounds plausible and seems to have worked for him. Anyone else report a similar case history—K.S.W.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE: We offer this department to readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or chance. Give your own name and full address. Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, each inquiry addressed to *Lost Trails* will be run in three consecutive issues. Requests by and concerning women are declined, as not considered effective in a magazine published for men. *Adventure* also will decline any notice that may not seem a sincere effort to recover an old friendship, or that may not seem suitable to the editors for any other reason. No charge is made for publication of notices.

E. Langdon, 2010 S.W. 16th Terrace, Miami, Florida, would like to contact Jim Langdon of Sault St. Marie, who was in St. Petersburg, Florida, in 1926.

Mrs. Lee Kay would like to hear from her brother, Tex Ranger, or anyone knowing his whereabouts. He was last heard of in Connecticut. He is 47 years old, has dark hair, plays a guitar and usually wears western clothes. Address letters to Lake Jackson, Texas.

I would like to hear from anyone knowing the whereabouts of Bill Thomas, ex-marine. He is believed to be from Pennsylvania. He served overseas and then was stationed at Unit "D" in Norfolk, Virginia until July, 1945, then at Camp Lejune, North Carolina, until September, 1945. Please get in touch with Mr. E. C. Becraft, 4512 Philpotts Road, Norfolk 2, Virginia.

Henry O. Niles, Box 684, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, wants to hear from anyone knowing his father, Edward William Niles, born in 1890 at St. Paul, Minnesota. He is of Swedish descent, is 5 feet 7 inches, has blue eyes and blond hair. His left leg or foot is crippled. He was in the Army or Navy for 12 years, later worked in shoe factories and was employed by International Shoe Co., Kirksville, Missouri, from 1914 until 1916. He was seen in Kirksville in 1936-7. He was a machinist and also repaired sewing machines. He has lived in St. Louis and in Macomb, Illinois.

Will anyone who served with Corporal William Yarian, Company B, 297th Engineer (C) Battalion in France, please write to his mother, Mrs. H. Yarian, 28411 Rollcrest Road, Route 1, Farmington, Michigan.

Wanted, information as to whereabouts of Everett "Nemo" Ruess, age 32; height 5 ft. 7, weight 140, wears size 9 shoes, black hair worn in single lock in front, goes bareheaded. Artist-cowboy-writer, he disappeared in 1934, again in 1935, from St. Petersburg, Fla. May be living with Indians in the Southwest or in Mexico. V. Summers, 805 Guerrero St., San Francisco, Cal.

Can anyone tell me the present whereabouts of Didier Mason, who dropped the first bombs in warfare, in the Mexican revolution, about 1912? He was in Belize after 1919, and then New Orleans. Edward F. Hinkle, c/o ADVENTURE.

Anyone knowing the address at the present time or in recent years of Frank Lester Gunter, please write Robert E. Mahaffey, Box 818, Oklahoma City. He was discharged from the Army in 1931. He was born July 29, 1903 or 1907, has lived in Dardanelle and Clinton, Arkansas; Wardin and Blackwell, Oklahoma; St. Louis; Granite City, Illinois. His father, T. C. Gunter, lived in St. Cloud, Florida, and Clinton, Arkansas.

Information and address wanted of my brother, Lewis Edward Kiger, born in 1904 at Badger, Kansas. He is about 5 feet 5 inches, has blue eyes, dark red hair. Last heard of in 1923 at Fort San Houston, Texas, and was a member of Battery A, 15th Field Artillery, ASN 6 211 468. He lived at Clearwater and Sawyer, Kansas; Webb City, Alba, and other towns in Missouri. He had the nickname of Buck. Please write Earl Kiger, c/o Andrew Taylor, 200 Kerr-McGee Building, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

I would like to find Herbert A. Roig, forty-five years old, 5 feet 10 inches tall, weight around 150 pounds. He has gray eyes and brown hair. He was last heard of in Texas in 1940. Please send any information to Frank Landon, 1146 Webster Street, San Francisco 15, California.

I would like to locate my son, Willis Hilliard, born in 1898 in Denton County, Texas. He is 5 feet 11 inches, weighs around 160 pounds, has brown hair and brown eyes and a dark complexion. He joined the Navy in 1916 and was on the USS Pennsylvania and Maumee. He was in submarines for a time on convoy and had his ears badly injured. T. Y. Hilliard, 513 South 26th Street, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Ernest O'Breeden, 1700 Eva Street, Austin 22, Texas, would like to hear from Larry O'Reilly, believed to have left Los Angeles, California, for somewhere in Illinois.

Does anyone who served in the 745th Ordnance in the Philippines from December 7th, 1941 to March, 1942, know what has become of Pvt. George Lyle Kendoll? Any information will be appreciated by Stephen Boyer, 52 Roca Street, Ashland, Oregon.

I would like to hear from anyone knowing about Frederick Earl Morton, son of Robert A. Morton, born September 1, 1887. He was last heard of in Detroit, Michigan. Please write to U. Grant Morton, Bennett Lake Road, Route 3, Fenton, Michigan.

I would like to locate William Hefferon, Sr. He served in the Navy in World War I, worked in a shipyard in Newport News, and has lived in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and St. Louis, Missouri, where he was last seen. I am just back from service in the Marines and would like to locate my father. William Hefferon, Jr., 2716a South 7th Street, St. Louis 18, Missouri.

I would greatly appreciate information from anyone knowing the whereabouts of Benjamin Franklin Richards, usually known as Richie. He was last heard of in the Bronx, New York, about 19 years ago. He is now about 44 years old. Please write to his son, Frank Richards, 1055 Third Avenue, New York, N. Y.

Anyone knowing the names and addresses of any of the survivors of the ill-fated merchant ship *S. S. Paul Luckenbach* that was torpedoed in the Indian Ocean September 22, 1942, please write William J. Lehner, 1631 Morse Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, who was a member of the Navy gun crew aboard.

I want to locate an old army buddy, Richard L. Carner, who lives in Schenectady, N. Y. He was formerly a member of the 93rd T. C. Squadron, 439th T. C. Group. If anyone knows his address, please notify Stanley J. Gobert, Box 143, Princeton, Michigan.

Anyone having any information about William J. Smith, please write his brother-in-law, E. E. Baker, 1214 60th Avenue, Oakland 3, California. Smith was born in Montesano, Washington, spent his school days in Grant's Pass, Oregon. He is six feet in height, with light brown hair and blue eyes, and was last heard of in the state of Washington.

I am seeking the whereabouts of my brother John Andrew Lannan, last heard of at City Island, New York about fifteen years ago. Was then engaged in shipbuilding and is believed to have moved to the state of Connecticut. Any information regarding him will be thankfully received by his brother, A. Lannan, 111 8th Ave. West, Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

I would like to hear from anyone knowing the address of W. F. (Billie) Benz, who used to ride rodeo in California some years ago. He was last heard of in Willits, California. C. R. Douglas, 628 Del Mar, Pasadena 5, California.

I would like to get in touch with anyone knowing the whereabouts of Joe Zimmer or any of his family. He formerly lived in Marion, Indiana, where he worked in a glass factory. M. Shulaw, 506 Dubois, Lawrenceville, Illinois.

Karl Miller, 1522 Mary Street, Marinette, Wisconsin, wishes to hear from anyone knowing the whereabouts of David Edwin (or Edward) Rivers, age 50, last known to be at 919 Bella-meade Avenue, Evansville, Indiana.

Roy H. Edman, General Delivery, Riverside, California, would like to locate the following people: H. Goodwin, his son, Reece Goodwin, or his daughters, Rebecca, Lucinda, Minnie, and Naomi Goodwin, or Ruth Doyle, last heard of in Wichita Falls, Texas, in 1921.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Sidney A. Levinson, of Yonkers, New York, thought to have been discharged from the Army, please contact his buddy who served with him in Melbourne, Australia, in early 1942. Pvt. George Raybin, 12035917, 26 Military Government, Hq. and Hq. Company, APO 235, San Francisco, California.

Pfc. Robert Wallish, 39735959, 3292nd Sig. Base Maint. Co., APO 75, c/o Postmaster, San Francisco, California, would like to get in touch with Robert Limbach, now sailing with the Merchant Marine, whose home is somewhere in Chicago.

George Bates, last known to have been at an RFD address in Camden, Minnesota. He is a jack of all trades, but worked mostly in steel work. Any information will be appreciated by Robert L. Page, 3308 Alabama Avenue, St. Louis Park, Minneapolis 16, Minn.

B. E. Tribble, R. Route 2, Rising Star, Texas, wants to hear from anyone who knows what happened to Sgt. James F. McDonald, 38094492, 3rd Auxiliary Surgical Group, APO 230, last heard from in February, 1943. He is especially interested in hearing from anyone who served with Sgt. McDonald in Africa.

Would like to hear from or about Leonard Owens last heard from in Indianapolis in 1944; George J. Snyder of Clarksburg, W. Va., last heard from at U.S.N. Receiving Station, Norfolk, Va., 1943; Lt. Robert Hairston 3rd, was in 15th Air Force, home in N. Carolina; Cpl. Pennington (nicknamed Penrod) 11th. Inf., Ft. Benj. Harrison in 1941; Leo Corns, lived in Indianapolis in 1944, now believed to be in Chicago; Sgt. Richard Thompson, 125th. Inf. Reg., Camp Maxey, Texas, 1944; Pvt. Douglas Williams or Wm. Douglas, home around Eldorado, Ill., last heard from in 11th. Inf. Reg., Ft. Benj. Harrison, 1941. Any information will be appreciated by G. E. Ziegler, care of Adventure—Lost Trails.

Lt. Ptmn. J. L. March, V25183, Royal Canadian Navy, 20 St. Anne St., La Providence, P. Q., Canada, wants information about his father, Sydney Wilford March, whom he hasn't seen in 71 years. He was born in Portsmouth, England, came to North America in his youth, last heard of in Rochester, N. Y.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Wilfred E. Schmaltz, born and raised in Chicago, Ill., last heard of residing at 84 Jackson St., San Francisco, Calif., please notify M. H. House, Box M. c/o Atlantic Refining Co., Meeteetse, Wyoming. He probably shipped in the Merchant Marine in Oct. 1944.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Carl Hatfield, born in western Kentucky, last heard of at Hardinsburg, Kentucky, in 1939, where he was in the taxi business, please communicate with his son, Pvt. James Ralph Hatfield, 35981592, 1-2 RR, AGFDR-2, Fort Ord, California.

(Continued from page 43)

"When I hit the top, I'll look you up," Frankie Riehl said. He picked up his bag and walked out into the night.

When the third round started, Harry Logan suddenly remembered where he was, and he could see Frankie Riehl rolling along the ropes, his face a red smear, and the young fighter with the long strong legs was slowly cutting Frankie down. The wet gloves made ugly sounds when they hit. Somebody yelled for the referee to stop it, but most of the crowd screamed for Frankie's blood. Harry Logan got a little nauseated and he got out of his seat.

"The hell with the main bout," Harry choked out, as he groped his way toward the stairs. "The hell with the whole rotten mess." The air in the armory was a compote of stale smells that put a sickness in both the mind and the body of Harry Logan, and he wanted to get out and drink deep of fresh clean air and forget all these things he had not wanted to remember. Near the exit, he heard an abrupt roar from the arena and he knew Frankie was down, hammered into insensibility.

Perhaps it was because Logan knew how lonesome a beaten fighter could be. More than likely he turned away from the exit because things got all mixed up inside his head. He quickly sought out an usher and he said, "I'm an old pal of Frankie Riehl's—I fought him once. I would like to go to the dressing room and see him."

"Yeah, anybody could see you was a fighter once," the man said. "But remember, you do any moochin' in there, and you get thrown out on your tin ear."



FRANKIE did not know Harry Logan at first. His brain was still wrapped in wool and his eyes were no clearer than the weather outside. After awhile, though, Harry managed to make himself known.

"Harry," Frankie said, his swollen lips trying to give out with a smile. "Harry Logan."

"Yeah, it's me, Frankie."

"I didn't do so good, Harry. How you been?"

"I get along," Harry Logan said lamely. His gravelly voice nearly failed him completely. "I happened t' be passin' through an'—" He turned his face away because Frankie's looked too much like it. "Where you goin' from here?"

"Up to LaCrosse," Frankie said. "I fight there day after tomorrer night." He grabbed a little slat of a handler by the sleeve. "Where is that bottle of beer, you bum? Get it, an' then finish patchin' me up!" He looked at Harry Logan again and he said, without smiling, "My last fight."

(Continued on page 145)

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"HOME IS THE WARRIOR"

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—tells how he had to fight—harder than he'd ever fought in the Army—to find and hold it. For the "peace" of John McQueen turned out to be a wallowing will-o-the-wisp in that brawling land which the Government had just opened up to homesteading vets. It was the West all over again with land-grabbers and crooks ready to swoop down on the unwary from behind every totem pole and someone had to stop 'em. McQueen—of course—got the job. . . . Colonel Emery, who served with distinction in Alaska and the western Aleutians during the war and can write about the country just as well as he knows it, gives us the first installment of a gripping two-part tale in our next.



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ON SALE SEPTEMBER 11th

(Continued from page 143)

Harry Logan nodded, but did not believe. He waited for Frankie to dress. Afterward, they went out the side-door the fighters used. It was snowing heavily now and Harry wished he had a pair of rubbers because every time he got a cold these days, he could not use his nose for breathing at all.

"I'm takin' the eleven o'clock bus," Frankie said. "Sorry we can't tie into a couple together, Harry. But it was like old times seein' you again."

"Luck," Logan said. He could think of nothing better to say.

"Take it easy, Harry," Frankie Riehl said, and started walking through the snow toward the bus station.

Harry Logan was still out there ten minutes later when a thick-set man and a hatless kid came out and shut the door behind them. "A nice fight, Lew," a middle-aged voice said. "You got him quicker than I figured."

"I said I was goin' to be a champ, Benny. I win them all up to now. What do you think now?"

"Look, Lew. I ain't sure yet. Maybe when I see you in one more fight—"

One more fight.

"You go to the hotel an' hit the sack," the man called Benny said. "I'm goin' back up there and get more dough out of that bum of a promoter."

"Yeah, the lousy chiseler," the fighter said, and Harry Logan saw that Lew had sandy-hair and clear blue eyes, and he remembered how young and fresh and cocky he had looked when he climbed into the ring to fight Black Trunks.

Benny went back inside, and the kid drew his coat-collar up over his ears and started crossing the street. Harry Logan felt as if he should run after Benny and talk to him, but he guessed the guy wouldn't listen. His kind seldom did. Instead, he watched the sandy-haired boy, and wondered for a few seconds why he seemed to walk like Frankie Riehl, and suddenly he knew, because he could still see but one pair of tracks in the snow.

A kind of horror welled up inside Harry Logan, and he almost screamed out, did take a few floundering steps after the kid before it dawned on him that if he made a scene out of all this, and people crowded around, they would say he was punchy and would shake their heads and suggest he be put away.

No, Harry Logan thought, and did not much care if he died then and there, they would never understand. No one but himself could know how terrifying it was to watch the sandy-haired fighter following right in the footsteps of Frankie Riehl.

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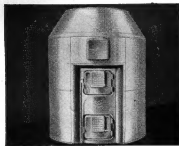
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